

LIBERATING LITURGY: VOICES OF LATIN AMERICAN THEOLOGY

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Ann Hidalgo

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Ann Hidalgo

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Faculty Committee

Dr. Santiago Slabodsky, Chairperson

Dr. Rosemary Radford Ruether

Dr. Frank Rogers

Dean of the Faculty

Dr. Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook

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ABSTRACT

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Ann Hidalgo

This dissertation uses feminist and decolonial theory to analyze liturgies in the liberation theology tradition that empower marginalized communities. Liturgies create alternative spaces in which marginalized groups can resist cultural impositions and envision life-affirming alternatives. Each chapter begins by exploring the context and theoretical background and concludes with an analysis of one or more liturgies that illustrate the theme of the chapter.

The first chapter uses the decolonial theory of Walter Mignolo and the work of liturgists from the Global South to analyze the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* and the *Misa popular salvadoreña*, Catholic Masses in the liberation theology tradition that are rooted in the local cultures and resist the universalizing tendencies of the Euro-centric Catholic tradition.

The second and third chapters analyze Roman Catholic bishop Pedro Casaldáliga's two extraordinary liturgies of repentance that are addressed to the indigenous and Afro-descendent peoples of Brazil respectively. The second chapter draws from Diego Irarrázaval's work on inculturation to analyze the *Misa da terra sem males* and examine the legacy of abuses perpetrated by the Church against the indigenous peoples. The third chapter uses Black Latin American theology to unveil the racism enmeshed in Christian theological tropes and to evaluate the strengths and weakness of the *Misa dos Quilombos*, which honors the memory of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century communities of fugitive slaves.

The fourth chapter traces the emergence of feminist theology in Latin America, highlights the importance of women's rituals to the task of deconstructing patriarchy, and analyzes the rituals of the Con-spirando Collective in Chile that address topics such as personal experience and ecofeminism.

The epilogue analyzes two examples composed in the past five years—*jAy, Campiña Mía!*, a collection of Cuban liturgical music, and the Brazilian *Missa da Consciência Negra*—and identifies groups that are using liturgy creatively to address current tensions in the Latin American churches.

The appendix includes the beginning elements of a musical performance piece for women's voices that I am writing to reflect Latin American women's engagement with spirituality. Through music and storytelling it introduces Latin American feminist theology to wider audiences and invites reflection on justice issues facing churches and society.

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Introduction

From the earliest days of the liberation theology movement in Latin America, theologians have insisted that the Christian tradition is relevant in their contexts as a worldview that supports people's desires to live life to the fullest. Although the colonizers and the local elites had used Christian theology for centuries to control and domesticate, the liberationists believed that a theology articulated from the everyday realities of people who lacked material advantages and social influence would be empowering and liberating. Following their scriptural hermeneutic, liberation theologians interpreted the gospels as an announcement of the arrival of the kingdom of God and a call for believers to work toward making the promised future of justice and peace a reality. This perspective diverted theological attention from an otherworldly future and focused on the material conditions in which people lived and the social structures that place the few in positions of privilege and the many in positions of need.

The earliest exponents of liberation theology concentrated their attention on the liberation of people from poverty—conditions of material want, social disadvantage, and political powerlessness. Using the strategy of conscientization developed by popular educator Paolo Freire, pastoral agents invited communities to gather and reflect on their life experiences in relation to biblical texts that emphasized God's willingness to hear the cry of those who suffer. Perceiving God on their side and drawing strength from the solidarity of the community, people began to realize—became conscientized to—the fact that their sufferings had a structural component and were not merely the result of personal misfortune. Working together, these communities embarked on projects to improve their material wellbeing, such as providing clean water for a village or improving roads, inspired by their religious commitments. Calling to mind

the story of the Exodus, the people trusted that God would help them in their time of need just as God had heard the cries of the ancient Israelites and led them out of slavery in Egypt.

Liberation theologians saw themselves engaged in a profound revolution of theological and ecclesiological practice. Throughout the history of Christianity, theology had been the province of the elite, and only well-educated and sophisticated thinkers could contribute to it. Although the early liberation theologians were well-educated men (mostly priests) in positions of relative privilege, they believed that the process of theologizing involved a hermeneutical circle that began from the lived experiences of the people and returned there to be validated. Topics with no relevance or connection to the daily lives of people who were struggling for survival had to be put aside in favor of direct contributions to the liberation of people from oppression. As the validating criteria of theology changed, church institutions likewise needed to adjust. Churches that had long served the interests of the elite had to align themselves differently if they were to serve the suffering people with whom God sides.

The liturgies that grow from the liberation theology tradition reflect these new theological and ecclesiological perspectives, and they operate out of an aesthetic that is attentive to the local context. Using simple, clear language for song lyrics and local folk instruments and musical styles, the composers offer the language of the new theological perspective for people to sing and learn by heart. With lyrics that emphasize the need for people to take an active role in their own liberation, the songs prove that the Christian tradition can be different from what people have been taught.

Drawing on Marxist analysis, the early liberation theologians used the socio-economic category “the poor” as the center of their thinking. Initially women who were involved as pastoral agents and members of liberation theology communities accepted and used the

generalized terminology, but as liberation theology developed these women recognized a need for greater clarity. Women and men experience poverty differently. Although both suffer the effects of political oppression, racism, and systematic exclusion, women suffer additionally under the patriarchal legacy at work in secular society and in the theology of the churches. Feminist theologians strive to uncover the oppressive elements in the Christian tradition and offer an alternative vision of what the tradition might become. Seeking a more just, inclusive, holistic, and diverse faith, these theologians set about reconstructing theological paradigms starting from the experiences of daily life, recovering the sacredness of the body, and recognizing the interdependence of everything in the cosmos.

Ritual celebrations are particularly well suited to the creation of new symbols and the development of feminist language. As women design celebrations, their use of art, music, poetry, dance, symbolic action, and drama challenges the androcentric character of traditional Christian liturgy and offers an alternative. Rituals provide a space in which women can share their stories and draw attention to the issues that are most pressing in their lives, including the struggles for survival, flourishing, justice, and peace. This shared space of rituals is instrumental in healing and gathering the energy to continue the struggle for liberation.

Outline of the Dissertation

The first chapter begins with an exploration of the decolonial theory of Walter Mignolo to present the problem of imperial interference and link the imposition of Euro-centric norms with the suppression of local Latin American expressions. Next, I consider the work of postcolonial liturgists, Michael Jagessar and Stephen Burns, and liturgists from the Global South, Anscar Chupungco and Edwin Mora, to connect the cultural, political, and economic analysis of the decolonial theorists with the topic of liturgy. Finally, the heart of this chapter is an analysis of

two Roman Catholic Mass settings written during the late 1970s in the liberation theology tradition: the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Peasant Mass) by Carlos Mejía Godoy and the *Misa popular salvadoreña* (Salvadoran Popular Mass) by Guillermo Cuéllar. These settings articulate the core ideals of liberation theology in the compressed poetic form of their song lyrics. By emphasizing the particularities of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran situations, the composers resist the universalizing tendencies of the Euro-centric Catholic tradition and uphold the postcolonial ideal of honoring peoples on the margins. Articulation of the central themes of liberation theology – the preferential option for the poor, identifying God’s actions in history, and understanding Christ as incarnate in the people of God – transform the “universal” canonical texts into specific, particularized analyses of the realities of the poor communities of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The second chapter considers the legacy of abuses perpetrated by the Church against the indigenous peoples of Latin America. The first section explores the arrival of Christianity in the Americas by analyzing the role of evangelization within the political and economic process of colonization and by highlighting the role of Bartolomé de las Casas, one of the earliest advocates for indigenous peoples. The second section introduces the pastoral practice of inculturation through the work of Diego Irarrázaval, who suggests that Christianity must be incarnated anew through the worldviews and cultures of each sector of society if it is to conform to the message of the gospel. The third section traces the career of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, who experienced a call to walk in solidarity with indigenous communities of Brazil and to challenge the Church to ask forgiveness for its racist and colonizing actions toward the indigenous peoples. The final section is an analysis of the *Missa da terra sem males* (Mass of the Land without Evil) written by Casaldáliga and his collaborators and first performed in São Paulo, Brazil on April 22, 1979.

This Mass is an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the Church, an expression of remorse, and a commitment to walk in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Brazil and of all of Latin America in the future.

The third chapter addresses the relationship between the Christian churches and the Afro-Brazilian population. The legacy of slavery and the pernicious effects of coloniality are a daily reality for Afro-Brazilians. The first section of this chapter reviews the history of the quilombos, communities of fugitive slaves, and explains their place in the current Afro-Brazilian imagination. The second explores the theological contributions of Black Christians who explain how mainstream theology has promoted racist sentiments and behaviors. Pedro Casaldáliga's *Missa dos Quilombos* expresses the Church's repentance for its direct and complicit roles in the slave trade and its ongoing failure to help bring about justice for the Afro-Brazilian population. The final section of this chapter analyzes the *Missa dos Quilombos* for its contribution to mending the Church's relationship with Afro-Brazilians while identifying its limitations.

The fourth chapter focuses on the women of Latin America. The first section of this chapter traces the emergence of feminist theology in Latin America beginning with a timeline of key feminist theologians, significant themes, and important developments. The second section focuses on the importance of the celebration of rituals to women's groups in Latin America. The creative expressions—music, art, dance, poetry, symbolic action, and drama—that feature prominently in women's rituals play a significant role in deconstructing patriarchal images of God, calling attention to the experiences of daily life, honoring the body, and envisioning a new society that respects the inherent dignity in each human life and in the natural world. The third section of the chapter analyzes two rituals created by the women of the Con-spirando Collective in Santiago, Chile. These rituals address many of the issues raised by the liturgies analyzed in the

earlier chapters of this work while drawing the concerns of feminist theology into the mix. Through their explicit content, leadership models, and styles of celebration, these liturgies represent a renewal of the Christian tradition and the hope that it may be an ally, rather than an obstacle, to the struggles for justice and the fullness of life.

The epilogue analyzes two examples of Latin American liturgical and ritual practice from the past five years: the first is *jAy, Campiña Mía!*, a CD of liturgical music created by Agua Viva, an ecumenical group in Matanzas, Cuba, and the second is the *Missa da Consciência Negra*, the Mass of Black Consciousness, that premiered in São Paulo, Brazil in 2011. These examples demonstrate that many of the same concerns addressed in the liturgies written approximately thirty-five years ago that were analyzed in earlier chapters are still points of contention for Christian communities in Latin America. Though each example focuses on the concerns particular to the group that created it, the ongoing participation in and engagement with the Christian tradition ties them together.

The appendix includes the beginning elements of a musical performance piece for women's voices that I am writing to share the insights of Latin American feminist theologians and reflect on Latin American women's engagement with spirituality. It is inspired by the tradition of Latin American liberation theology, the liturgies and rituals analyzed in this dissertation, and, in particular, the Con-spirando Collective. I can envision this piece being performed for church communities and used as a starting point for reflection and discussion. Through music and storytelling it introduces Latin American feminist theology to wider audiences and invites reflection on justice issues facing churches and society.

Chapter 1

From Imperial Imposition to the Encounter with “*el Dios que suda en la calle/the God who sweats in the street*”¹

The existence and practice of Christianity in Latin America has always had political implications. In the fifteenth century, Christianity arrived in the region as part of a project that linked missionary fervor with economic exploitation. As they took their first steps on the unfamiliar soil, the conquistadors used theological language to justify their search for personal riches and glory as well as territory, subjects, and wealth for Spain. Europeans imposed the Christian religion on the indigenous peoples as one aspect of a composite civilization that suppressed and replaced existing political, economic, cultural, epistemic, linguistic, and social traditions.

Throughout the colonial era, the Church remained closely allied to the government and a powerful symbol of European control over life in this world and, purportedly, in the next. Even as the Latin American nations gained formal independence, the Church maintained its loyalties to wealth and power by aligning itself with newly influential leaders in the developing states. Although we can trace a lineage of dissenting prophetic voices through the centuries, those who challenged the abuses of the Church did not garner the support needed to redirect the Church’s trajectory.

In the mid-twentieth century the development of Latin American liberation theology signaled an important rupture with this heritage of Church privilege. By claiming a “preferential option for the poor,” liberationists shifted the focus of theological efforts from the concerns of the wealthy and powerful to those of the poor and oppressed. These theologians drew from biblical notions of justice to critique contemporary politics and economics and to claim that God

¹ José María Vigil and Angel Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas: Transcripción y comentario teológico* (Managua: CAV-CEBES, 1998), 12.

is on the side of those who suffer. This act of articulating theology from a different vantage point performs a *decolonial shift* in theological knowledge and understanding.

I begin this chapter with an exploration of the decolonial theory of Walter Mignolo in order to establish the problem of imperial interference and link the imposition of Euro-centric norms with the suppression of local Latin American expressions. Next, I consider the work of postcolonial liturgists, Michael Jagessar and Stephen Burns, and liturgists from the Global South, Anscar Chupungco and Edwin Mora, to connect the cultural, political, and economic analysis of the decolonial theorists with the topic of liturgy. Finally, the heart of this chapter is an analysis of two Roman Catholic Mass settings written during the late 1970s in the liberation theology tradition: the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Peasant Mass) by Carlos Mejía Godoy and the *Misa popular salvadoreña* (Salvadoran Popular Mass) by Guillermo Cuéllar. These settings articulate the core ideals of liberation theology in the compressed poetic form of their song lyrics. By emphasizing the particularities of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran situations, the composers resist the universalizing tendencies of the Euro-centric Catholic tradition and uphold the postcolonial ideal of honoring peoples on the margins. Articulation of the central themes of liberation theology – the preferential option for the poor, identifying God’s actions in history, and understanding Christ as incarnate in the people of God – transforms the “universal” canonical texts into specific, particularized analyses of the realities of the poor communities of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Decolonial Theory

In his book *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Walter Mignolo begins with the premise that knowledge and aesthetic norms are not universally established by a transcendent subject; they are established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers. Mignolo claims that the local

knowledge created in Europe (and by cultural extension in the United States) has claimed for itself universal validity and devalued the local knowledges of the areas which it has colonized.²

Mignolo explains that some societies have been silenced, by which he means that although talking and writing take place, these ideas are not heard as part of the production of knowledge around the globe.³ The dominant, colonizing local histories and languages have silenced them.

Mignolo claims that subjugated knowledges can be transformed by becoming new loci of enunciation. The emergence of these subalternized knowledges has the power to enact intellectual decolonization.⁴ Colonizing knowledge presents itself as universal by failing to acknowledge its embodiment, by which I mean that it speaks as though context does not influence the content of knowledge. This false universality imposes on the recipient a set of social hierarchies (including racism, sexism, and heterosexism), religious beliefs, and nationalistic ideologies.

In *The Idea of Latin America* Walter Mignolo describes coloniality, the logical structure that undergirds colonial domination, as the underside of modernity.⁵ The dominant historical narrative that has been created and disseminated by the colonizers for centuries has obscured the perspective of the colonized. What Mignolo calls the modern/colonial world developed with the transatlantic economy in the sixteenth century that allowed Europe to benefit and flourish during the Renaissance at the expense of the peoples and lands it conquered.⁶ Although the era of direct colonial domination ended with the formation of independent nation-states, the logic of

² Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

³ Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 71.

⁴ Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 13.

⁵ Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 7.

⁶ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xiii.

coloniality still functions and shapes political, economic, cultural, and religious interactions among the peoples of the world.⁷

As the “untold and unrecognized historical counterpart of modernity,” coloniality represents a different paradigm and epistemic starting point from which to analyze, critique, and retell the story of the encounter between European and indigenous people in what is now known as Latin America.⁸ This shift in knowledge and understanding is the first step in decolonizing perceptions of the world and society; it is a turn from imperial principles to the perspectives of those who have been denied a voice in the dominant version of history and an active role in shaping their futures. For Mignolo this shift is crucial because it is capable of changing the “*terms of the conversation, and not just the content without questioning the terms.*”⁹ It demonstrates that the principles of knowledge are different depending on where one is located within the imbalanced power structure of the modern/colonial world.¹⁰

Following the work of indigenous thinkers, Mignolo challenges the dominant historical narrative of the “discovery of the New World,” preferring to describe the encounter as the “invention of America.” This distinction is significant because it represents two different paradigms from which historical events can be interrogated and understood.¹¹ The dominant paradigm portrays triumphant European explorers discovering a New World and offering its inhabitants Christianity (salvation), civilization (membership in the Spanish Empire), and the Spanish language (a language in which history and knowledge are communicated). Until the twentieth century the European perspective was nearly unchallenged in written historical records

⁷ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xv.

⁸ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, x-xi.

⁹ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xviii.

¹⁰ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 13.

¹¹ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 3.

and was able to portray itself as universal. The colonizers believed that the human status of the indigenous people was up for debate; the colonized were objects rather than subjects of their own histories.¹² Mignolo explains that “lurking beneath the European story of discovery are the histories, experiences, and silenced conceptual narratives of those who were disqualified as human beings, as historical actors, and as capable of thinking and understanding.”¹³

By contrast, the phrase “the invention of America” suggests that the colonizers designed a particular economic, religious, and civilizational project that would force the newly conquered territories to operate in the service of the imperial center. To contest the triumphal language of “discovery” is an act of resistance that operates from a different paradigm; it highlights the imbalance of power between the civilizations and questions the legitimacy of imperial projects and goals. From the perspective of the indigenous peoples, the encounter with the European conquerors was one of destruction. The Aymaran term *Pachakuti* poignantly describes the event as “a total disruption of space and time,” which Mignolo interprets as “a revolution in reverse.”¹⁴ Luis Rivera Pagán calls it “an event of expropriation” in which “suddenly, the inhabitants of these lands, without any mediating negotiations, found themselves under imposed subordination, and were informed in various ways of their new nature as *owned beings*.”¹⁵ This new status of imposed subordination is what Mignolo describes as the *colonial wound*, “the feeling of inferiority imposed on human beings who do not fit the predetermined model in Euro-American narratives.”¹⁶

¹² Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xii.

¹³ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 4.

¹⁴ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xiv.

¹⁵ Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 12.

¹⁶ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xii.

The production of knowledge is of key interest to Mignolo. Although particular historical narratives and civilizational worldviews were imposed by the colonizers, they were not able to displace entirely the previously established (and continuing) narratives and worldviews of the colonized peoples. As he challenges the notion that knowledge is accumulated in the centers of power and then spread to other parts of the world, Mignolo plainly states: “knowledge is produced, accumulated, and critically used everywhere.”¹⁷ The decolonizing shift is to acknowledge, honor, and speak from the previously suppressed positions. The task of articulating and adopting decolonial theory leads to envisioning a world that functions differently in the cultural, economic, political, civic, and personal domains.¹⁸

Liturgical Studies

In *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives*, Michael Jagessar and Stephen Burns document the need for critical postcolonial analyses of liturgical literature and practice. They believe that the postcolonial critique provides a tool with which to “scrutinize imperial and cultural texts for their support of the colonial agenda.”¹⁹ For the authors, the legitimacy of liturgy is called into question if postcolonial concerns are not addressed. They believe the ultimate goal of postcolonial analysis is to affirm the equal dignity of human beings, expose the function of imperial dynamics in everyday life, and honor subaltern wisdom and resistance to imposed norms.²⁰ A liturgy that thwarts these goals cannot be considered genuinely Christian.

For Jagessar and Burns, it is imperative to question whether liturgical texts, symbols, and images perpetuate imperial control and oppression. In particular, they wish to analyze the

¹⁷ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 115.

¹⁸ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, xx, 11.

¹⁹ Michael N. Jagessar and Stephen Burns, *Christian Worship: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2011), 33.

²⁰ Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 11.

representation of racial and ethnic minorities, gender, and sexuality within the words and symbols of liturgical action.²¹ Liturgical texts, symbols, and gestures are not merely ends in themselves; rather, they point to cultural, religious, political, and ideological interests and the contexts from which the symbols and representations emerge. The authors explain that analyzing these interests and contexts is critical because “representations or the symbols/images cultivated and nurtured in the ‘mind’ have enormous implications for ‘flesh and blood’ people in real contexts.”²²

A crucial issue in postcolonial analysis is who has the power to select liturgical symbols and images. Are decisions always made from the center of authority, or do those on the margins have the power to shape their own liturgical experiences? The authors believe that while the Second Vatican Council’s *Sacrosanctum Concilium* opened the field for Catholics outside of Europe to make “legitimate variations and adaptations” of the Roman rite, the countervailing push for Catholic unity narrowed the potential scope of these variations.²³ Filipino liturgist Anscar Chupungco uses theological language to counter the rejection of diversity by describing liturgical pluralism as “an incarnational imperative, rather than a concession of Vatican II.”²⁴ For Chupungco a liturgy that fails to embrace the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells of the local culture is missing the cultural connections that bring it to life. Similarly, Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva highlights the importance of allowing freedom for local liturgical expression by explaining that “God's revelation in Jesus Christ was in a concrete culture. The

²¹ Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 36-37.

²² Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 46.

²³ Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 34.

²⁴ Jagessar and Burns, *Christian Worship*, 34.

God of Christianity is the incarnate God.”²⁵ If God expresses the divine self through different cultures, to restrict local expression is to restrict the self-revelation of God.

Liturgies have the potential to be what Mignolo refers to as “new loci of enunciation.” In the case of the Central American liberation theology Masses analyzed below, the universal (and in some instances canonical) texts of the Euro-centric church are enfleshed in the people, locations, geographical settings, flora, and fauna of Latin America. In their composition, the authors of these works enact intellectual decolonization and reaffirm their voices as distinct Christian expressions.

Transferring Mignolo’s cultural insights into the field of religion, de Lima Silva believes that Latin America has the potential to envision and enact an alternative Christianity. Although Christianity was born in the region from a “Christocentrism that justified invasion, death, human sacrifice in the name of the faith in God,” de Lima Silva believes that it can be reinvented from a local perspective. To articulate a Christology centered on “those crucified on Earth” would offer a radically different perspective of the Christian story.²⁶

Costa Rican liturgist Edwin Mora explains that rites and symbols that do not arise from the cultural context in which they are celebrated will always lack meaning and vital energy. All pastoral work, not only liturgy, must be brought to life within the social and cultural realities of the communities in Latin American, Indigenous, and Caribbean contexts, and it should never deny or reject the culture in which it is celebrated.²⁷ If the liturgy is to serve the needs of the community, it must take seriously the reality of the community.

²⁵ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, “Mission and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Reality,” *International Review of Mission* 85, no. 338 (1996): 407.

²⁶ De Lima Silva, “Mission and Afro-Brazilian Cultural Reality,” 407.

²⁷ Edwin Mora Guevara, *La Celebración Cristiana: Renovación Litúrgica Contextual* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Sebila, 2009), 85.

Analysis of Liturgies

During the tumultuous decade of the 1970s, the liberation theology movement in Central America drew the Catholic Church into the revolutionary struggles that sought empowerment and justice for the oppressed. Although the Church had a long history of alliance with state powers and the wealthy elite in Latin America, the balance shifted as a number of priests, sisters, lay pastoral workers, and even bishops embraced the preferential option for the poor. This new theological perspective called for creative forms of expression. Emboldened by the Second Vatican Council's call for inculturated liturgy and the Latin American Bishops' affirmation of liberation theology, musicians took up the task of composing new settings of the Mass.

In this section I will analyze the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* (Nicaraguan Peasant Mass) by Carlos Mejía Godoy and the *Misa popular salvadoreña* (Salvadoran Popular Mass) by Guillermo Cuéllar. These two settings clearly embody the central ideals of liberation theology, resist the universalizing tendencies of the Euro-centric Catholic tradition, and honor the poor and oppressed people of Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The liberation theology Masses are not without precedent; a number of Latin American Masses were written during the 1950s and 1960s that honor the local communities. Musically, they feature popular instruments of the region, including the guitar and the marimba, and the rhythms and melodic types of local folk songs. In terms of performance practice, many follow the style of local folk and popular music, allowing for improvisation and congregational participation through clapping as well as singing. In these respects, they participate in a trend of community or participatory Masses that had been gaining ground in the Catholic Church through the 1950s and 1960s in Europe and elsewhere.²⁸ Latin American Masses of this type include the

²⁸ José María Vigil and Angel Torrellas, *Misas Centro Americanas*, 5.

Misa panamericana from Mexico, which features mariachis, and the *Misa criolla* from Argentina, which features Andean folk styles and instruments.

Like their predecessors, the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* and the *Misa popular salvadoreña* use local instruments, popular performance practices, and folk song styles but take the additional step of reflecting the theological perspectives of the Central American liberation theologians in their lyrics. These lyrics are crucial because, as decolonial theorists claim, language contains radical potential for “epistemic revolution.”²⁹ As they honor the people and lands that have been suppressed, they envision an alternative future and work to bring that utopian dream into reality.

The following sections will examine the historical and cultural contexts in which the *Misa campesina* and *Misa popular* were composed and highlight the instances in which changes to the canonical Mass texts result in an altered (and decolonizing) theological vision.

Nicaragua

Across the Central American region through the mid-twentieth century, the majority of the population lived in poverty while a small oligarchy controlled land and resources. Phillip Berryman suggests a number of reasons why the Central American nations were pushed toward revolution during the 1970s: the poor majority in each country suffered a loss of real earnings; deeply engrained structural causes of poverty prevented easy solutions; and landowners increasingly grew crops for export, which created food shortages among the local poor. Berryman finds that the relatively small size of the Central American nations provided an advantage for creating nationwide revolutionary movements, and the fledgling movements were

²⁹ Mignolo, *Idea of Latin America*, 112.

aided by the fact that the United States paid little attention to the region until 1978 when the Sandinista revolution began in earnest.³⁰

Under the Somoza regime, Nicaragua was the poorest country in Central America. The Somoza family directly controlled 40% of the country's total economy. The focus on cash crops, such as coffee, cotton, and tobacco, forced many peasants away from the traditional small farms where they could grow subsistence crops. Before the Sandinista victory, the official unemployment rate was 22% but that statistic does not take into account those who worked outside the formal sector of the economy. The average illiteracy rate among adults was 60% but in rural areas was 93%. A university education was accessible to only 0.3% of the population, and only 5% attended school beyond grade five.³¹

During the 1970s opposition to the Somoza regime increased dramatically. In 1972 a major earthquake destroyed huge sections of Managua. In the midst of the drastic suffering of wounded and displaced citizens, the Somozas diverted incoming foreign aid into their own bank accounts. As the decade progressed, harassment by the National Guard, repression of dissidents, and other governmental abuses grew so pronounced that most Christians became opposed to the Somoza regime.

In Nicaragua, as in other Latin American countries, the shortage of priests in rural areas combined with an upsurge in grassroots movements and the educational process of Paulo Freire to transform the experience of many Christians. Groups of lay workers, in particular the Delegates of the Word, adopted Freire's dialectical learning method, known as *concientización*, and formed base communities, or *comunidades eclesiales de base*. These base communities

³⁰ Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 8-10.

³¹ Statistics from Margaret Randall, *Sandino's Daughters: Testimonies of Nicaraguan Women in Struggle*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), xiii-xiv.

focused on re-reading the Bible as inspiration and support for the project of liberating the oppressed. This perspective called all believers to work for the transformation of unjust societal structures that oppress the poor and to create right relationships that bring about the kingdom of God on earth. At their conference in Medellín, Colombia in 1968, the Latin American bishops affirmed this theology of liberation and thus committed the Church to be on the side of the poor.³²

Pastoral work in Nicaragua began to change during the 1960s with the establishment of base ecclesial communities in Managua. A Spanish priest, José de la Lara, and a Maryknoll sister, Estela Cope, implemented the newly evolving pastoral method of base ecclesial communities at a new parish founded in a squatters' settlement on the edge of Managua. By the mid-1960s base communities were established in other marginalized areas of the capital and in other cities as well.³³ Ernesto Cardenal, a diocesan priest who had trained with Thomas Merton, founded the monastic community of Solentiname on an island in Lake Nicaragua in 1966. Using the base community approach, men and women gathered each week to discuss the gospel and interpret its relevance for their lives.

As the 1970s progressed Ernesto Cardenal and several other priests, including his brother Fernando Cardenal, along with Miguel D'Escoto and Edgar Parrales, joined the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional). Their Christian presence among the revolutionaries altered the movement and broadened its ideological perspectives. As the movement took shape,

³² Andrew Bradstock, *Saints and Sandinistas: The Catholic Church in Nicaragua and its Response to the Revolution* (London: Epworth Press, 1987), 8.

³³ Karla Koll, "Struggling for Solidarity: Changing Mission Relationships between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Christian Organizations in Central America during the 1980s" (PhD dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2004), 409.

Sandinista leaders acknowledged that its orientation was not strictly Marxist-Leninist, but rather a mixture of Marxist, Liberal, and Christian thought.³⁴

Fernando Cardenal articulates the insights of liberation theology in a concise distinction between faith and atheism. As a way of reconciling the Marxist perspective prevalent in the Sandinista movement with Christian practice, he claims that the atheist is the one who does not love. He explains that those who are dedicated to the cause of the poor show genuine faith even if they do not acknowledge God; in the same way, those who claim to be Christian but fail to work for the poor deny God through their actions. He justified his choice to join the Sandinistas saying: “I prefer to be with those who, without putting God’s name on their lips, and perhaps without even formally knowing God, are doing all God asks to be done for a suffering people.”³⁵ Similarly, Sister Martha Frech Lopez of the congregation Missionaries of Charity, a revolutionary who was exiled for her work, explains: “When I was still quite young I made the decision to combine a religious and political vocation... I never saw any contradiction between socialism and Christianity... [Christ] didn’t agree with the corrupt government of his day. So for me, the way to be sure of not betraying the gospel is by standing beside my people.”³⁶

Christian imagery is prominent in the vocabulary of the Sandinistas. The idea of martyrdom identified revolutionaries who were willing to shed their blood for the people with Christ. Tomás Borge, one of the FSLN founders, spoke of archaeologists finding the supposed tomb of Sandino empty, which became the source of popular slogans such as “Sandino lives” and “Sandino yesterday, Sandino today, Sandino forever.”³⁷ Nicaraguan women who were active

³⁴ Bradstock, *Saints and Sandinistas*, 21.

³⁵ Bradstock, *Saints and Sandinistas*, 19-20.

³⁶ Quoted in Randall, *Sandino’s Daughters*, 154.

³⁷ Bradstock, *Saints and Sandinistas*, 38.

in the FSLN looked to the Virgin Mary as an example for the revolutionary “new woman.” Although traditionally Mary had been understood to encourage submissiveness, self-denial, and a sense of inferiority, Sandinista women honored her as a champion of the poor and liberator of the oppressed. Sister Martha Frech Lopez describes the new vision of Mary:

Today Nicaraguan women hold Mary the Mother of God as their first model for promoting this Revolution. She too carried to the world a message of liberation... Mary isn't the sugar-sweet stupid woman reactionary Christians so often make her out to be... At the age of fifteen she took an active part in the liberation of her people.³⁸

Misa campesina nicaragüense

Composed by Carlos Mejía Godoy, the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* is a prophetic call for social transformation that was written in the community of Solentiname, Ernesto Cardenal’s center of liberation theology. An analysis of the *Misa campesina* clearly illustrates the main impulses driving liberation theology and the Sandinistas’ peculiar mix of Marxist and religious language. Cardenal once pointed out that the *Misa campesina* is not neutral with respect to class struggle; it is a Mass against the oppressors.³⁹

In 1975 the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* premiered in Ciudad Sandino in Managua with Fernando Cardenal presiding, but the celebration was interrupted and stopped by the National Guard. Within days Archbishop Obando y Bravo declared the *Misa* unacceptable and unfit for use in a Roman Catholic context. While it has not been used formally as a Roman Catholic Mass, the *Misa* has been performed frequently underground and publicly in concert format after the Sandinistas took power.⁴⁰

³⁸ Randall, *Sandino's Daughters*, 162.

³⁹ Montserrat Galí Boadella, “Música para la teología de la liberación,” *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia* 11 (2002): 183.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia, s.v. “Misa Campesina Nicaragüense,” accessed April 7, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misa_Campesina_Nicarag%C3%BCense.

The composer, Carlos Mejía Godoy, belongs to the *Nueva Canción*, or New Song, movement in Latin America that developed during the 1970s. This movement produced songs inspired by folk music and lyrics that were strongly committed to social causes such as poverty, empowerment, imperialism, democracy, human rights, and religion. In Nicaragua a number of *Nueva Canción* musicians were involved with the Sandinista movement including Pacasán, Grupo Mancotal, Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy, Carlos Mejía Godoy, Duo Guardabarranco, and Grupo Libertad.⁴¹

Mejía Godoy includes many of the traditional elements of the Mass, but he handles them flexibly and includes additional pieces. He sets to music four of the five parts of the Ordinary of the Mass: the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, and Sanctus, omitting the Agnus Dei. He also includes songs for the opening and closing of the Mass, the offertory, a meditation following the offertory, and communion. Interestingly, he adds an additional piece before communion that is written in the Miskito language, an indigenous Nicaraguan language, rather than Spanish.

Mejía Godoy's texts are fascinating. Whereas other texts use more traditional religious language that asks the believer to identify God in the faces of the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, Mejía Godoy's text rejects these abstract, ideal types in favor of very specific images from his contemporary Nicaraguan society. The “Canto de entrada” (Entrance Song) identifies God as a worker who sweats in the street and waits in line to be paid at the end of the workday. No job is too humble for the God who sells lottery tickets, checks the air pressure in truck tires, and pours hot asphalt on the streets wearing overalls and work gloves.⁴² Likewise, the “Gloria” praises God as present in various Nicaraguan cities and towns and calls for God to be

⁴¹ Wikipedia, s.v. “Nueva canción,” accessed April 7, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nueva_canci%C3%B3n.

⁴² Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 12. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Spanish are mine.

praised with regional and indigenous musical instruments and types of dances. Several other songs locate the *Misa* in Nicaragua: the offertory song names types of fruits and vegetables that grow locally, the meditation lists many different types of local birds, and the communion song lists varieties of fish that seem to want to join in the singing and celebration.

The “Kyrie” is a particularly interesting inversion of traditional practice. The classical text simply implores God’s mercy (Kyrie eleison/Christe eleison/Kyrie eleison), and post-Vatican II Catholic Mass texts include an invocation of praise before each request for mercy. Mejía Godoy retains the repetitive structure but transforms the “Kyrie” into a request – or perhaps demand, depending on the tone of the individual performance – for God to be in solidarity with the oppressed. Rather than a cry for mercy for wrongdoings on the part of the people, the text insists that the people of the community have been wronged and need God’s support. Mejía Godoy writes, “Christ, Christ Jesus, identify yourself with us... Be in solidarity – not with the oppressing class that exploits and devours the community – but with the oppressed, with my people who thirst for peace.”⁴³ Because this is a fair assessment of the economic relations between rich and poor Nicaraguans and because the oppressive actions of elite Nicaraguans can easily be understood as systemic evil, Mejía Godoy changes the liturgical structure by replacing the opportunity for self-examination with an accusation of the wrongdoings of others.

The “Credo” is a curious mixture of original lyrics and passages of highly theological language borrowed from the Nicene Creed. The first stanza credits God with having created the beauty of the earth, the stars and moon, houses, little boats on the river, and the “forests that have been mutilated by the criminal axe.” The refrain calls God an architect, engineer, artisan,

⁴³ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 12.

carpenter, bricklayer, and assembly-line worker. The second verse addresses Jesus as the Worker Christ followed by several phrases that roughly echo the language of the Nicene Creed although in slightly different order and with some changes of emphasis (light from light, only begotten son of God, to save the world he was incarnate in the humble and pure womb of Mary). This section is followed by a graphic quatrain describing Jesus' suffering at the hands of the oppressive Romans: "I believe that you were beaten, ridiculed and tortured/martyred on the cross while Pilate was the judge/the Roman imperialist, bloody and heartless/who washing his hands wanted to wipe away the sin." The third stanza, which would typically be the statement of faith in the Holy Spirit, instead praises Christ for giving rise to the new man who is for liberation. Rather than allow Christ to remain a historical figure who is accessible only through abstract terms, Mejía Godoy insists on highlighting God's involvement in contemporary Nicaragua: "You are resurrected in each arm that is lifted to defend the people from exploitative domination."⁴⁴

By weaving together images of contemporary Nicaragua and biblical characters and events, Mejía Godoy steps into the tradition of Ernesto Cardenal's community at Solentiname. Cardenal's compilation, *The Gospel in Solentiname*, records dialogue homilies in which the people were encouraged to make such connections. Berryman explains, "On virtually every page parallels are drawn between the Gospels and the political realities of Nicaragua." For example, the Herods are like the Somozas, Pilate is like the "gringo ambassador" in Nicaragua, and the Roman soldiers are like Somoza's National Guard.⁴⁵

Mejía Godoy is very clear about the role God plays in human affairs and is similarly convinced of the commitment required of his fellow Nicaraguans. In the meditation song, he

⁴⁴ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 13.

⁴⁵ Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 10.

portrays the God of liberation theology, the God who is on the side of the poor: God is credited with having been a rebel, fighting night and day against humanity's injustice. In response to God's faithfulness, the people's obligation is stated clearly in the communion song: "Communion is not a trivial, banal ritual... It is communion with the struggle of the community. It is to say 'I am a Christian and, brother, you can count on me.'"⁴⁶

El Salvador

El Salvador differed from Nicaragua and many Latin American countries in that the Catholic Church had a large number of well-educated native-born priests. Archbishop Oscar Romero's predecessor, Archbishop Luis Chávez y González was archbishop of San Salvador for almost four decades. During that time he dedicated himself to encouraging Salvadoran priestly vocations, built a seminary, and sent many priests to study in Europe.⁴⁷ These priests were often from rural families rather than the urban middle class, so they had strong sympathies for the struggles of rural communities. He hosted monthly meetings for ongoing training in which the priests read and discussed the documents of Vatican II and the Latin American bishops' documents. He established a Pastoral Week, in which 200 bishops, priests, sisters, and lay people met to evaluate church work, critique social movements, and map out new directions in ministerial efforts.⁴⁸

During the 1950s, Catholic Action groups that attracted young intellectuals shifted from a more conservative "Italian" style of Catholic Action to the "French-Belgian" style that emphasized temporal commitment.⁴⁹ Over the next decades groups began studying the social

⁴⁶ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 14.

⁴⁷ Berryman, *Stubborn Hope*, 17.

⁴⁸ Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 100.

⁴⁹ Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 100.

doctrine of the church, pastoral workers opened retreat centers, and young people enrolled in courses on the Church's social doctrine. The Central American University in El Salvador also took on an important public role. Starting in the late 1960s, the faculty, led by Ignacio Ellacuría, promoted political, social, economic, and ecclesial critique aimed at helping the poor majority achieve justice.⁵⁰

The style of pastoral work that Rutilio Grande, close friend and formative influence on Oscar Romero, initiated in the city of Aguilares followed the method of Paulo Freire described above.⁵¹ Pastoral teams gave two-week missions during which they gathered data by talking with people and accepting people's hospitality. In the evening sessions the teams invited the whole community to read scripture and discuss its relevance. The pastoral workers would present information gathered in the process of talking with the people as a way of echoing and giving renewed voice to their concerns. The team chose to work within the framework of people's existing religious vision; the team's intent was not to turn them from religiosity to activism but to deepen the traditional religious vision and to transform it from an attitude of passivity to one of active struggle for change.

Although not all of the Salvadoran bishops agreed, Archbishop Romero understood the actions of the popular organizations to be consistent with the Gospel message. This was a direct application of the common post-conciliar notion that the Spirit is at work in the world.⁵² Romero believed that the conflict was not between the church and the government; he believed it was between the government and the people.⁵³ In his assessment, the church would fulfill its role

⁵⁰ Berryman, *Stubborn Hope*, 18.

⁵¹ Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 107-8.

⁵² Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 134.

⁵³ Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 137.

only by standing on the side of the people. He stated publicly in January 1980 that those responsible for the violence in El Salvador were the families of the oligarchy who refuse to acknowledge or accept peaceful attempts to address social problems, and on March 23, 1980 in what became his last Sunday sermon, he encouraged the troops to refuse to obey orders to shoot unarmed peasants.⁵⁴

Misa popular salvadoreña

Guillermo Cuéllar composed the *Misa popular salvadoreña* between 1978 and 1980. It grew out of the base community movement around San Salvador, particularly in the parishes of Zacamil and Resurrection.⁵⁵ Liberation theologian José María Vigil credits the priests of these parishes, Fr. Octavio Ortiz and Fr. Alfonso Navarro, both of whom were assassinated, as well as Fr. Plácido Erdozain with developing the theological language that took shape in Cuéllar's lyrics.

Like the *Misa campesina nicaragüense*, the *Misa popular salvadoreña* is not articulated from an abstract, purportedly universal, or apolitical starting point. It is grounded in the perspective of the poor of El Salvador who are fighting for their lives.⁵⁶ Using techniques similar to those of Mejía Godoy, Cuéllar specifies the speaking voice of the *Misa* in the Entrance Song by naming cities and parishes in the San Salvador area. Likewise, the “Gloria” prominently names the nation of El Salvador as the location of God’s saving action.⁵⁷ In his theological commentary to the *Misa*, Vigil describes the subject of the Mass as the Salvadoran people. Vigil explains that the speaking “protagonist” of the Mass is even more specific: the words are those of people who have been awakened, conscientized by the Word of God.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Berryman, *Religious Roots*, 147.

⁵⁵ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 21.

⁵⁶ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 21.

⁵⁷ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 23-24.

⁵⁸ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 21.

In her article “Oscar Romero’s Theology of Transfiguration,” moral theologian Margaret Pfeil explains that Archbishop Romero had a direct hand in the birth of the *Misa*. Romero asked Cuéllar to compose a piece for the Feast of the Transfiguration, which is celebrated to honor the Divine Savior, the patron of El Salvador. Cuéllar delivered the “Gloria” to Romero only days before the archbishop’s assassination. In his final Sunday homily on March 23, 1980, Romero wove lines from Cuéllar’s “Gloria” into his usual recounting of the week’s events and drew connections between the lived reality in El Salvador and his interpretation of salvation history.⁵⁹

The “Gloria” is particularly noteworthy because it encapsulates the spirit of the Mass in a few short verses. Although it is a song of praise, Cuéllar’s “Gloria” does not use or paraphrase the canonical text, which left it open to criticism from the Catholic hierarchy. It begins with a celebratory call to gather the people in the cathedral for the patronal feast, and the refrain is an expression of praise that names “our land: El Salvador” as the location of God’s redemptive action. The second verse praises God for being just and for defending the oppressed, and it announces the people’s desire to proclaim their collective worth and dignity. The intriguing third verse raises the theme of the Gospel account of the transfiguration. The people tell God that he will be glorified again just as Jesus was transfigured on Mount Tabor when he sees the people transformed and “when there is life and liberty in El Salvador.” The final verse acknowledges the difficulty inherent in bringing this transformation to fruition: the gods of power and money are opposed to it. The people, however, inform God that he “must be the first to raise [his] arm against the oppression.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Margaret R. Pfeil, “Oscar Romero’s Theology of Transfiguration,” *Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (2011): 87-88.

⁶⁰ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 24. I have avoided using gender inclusive language for God in my translations to be consistent with Cuéllar.

Like the “Gloria,” the “Interleccional,” a piece which replaces the responsorial psalm, opened the *Misa* to criticism by replacing official texts with a newly created one. This piece highlights the change of perception that occurs as an individual is transformed by a new understanding of faith. The lyrics speak of the sense of resignation with which the poor live their lives and the popular religious sensibilities that justify this resignation. The text explains: “My grandma told me, if you want to be saved, you have to carry your crosses in life,” and “The boss says we should resign ourselves and keep working if we want to obtain salvation in the next life.” Yet the refrain claims that while the protagonists had believed the inherited common sense perspective, hearing “God’s word caused us to change.” This new insight allows the protagonists to understand that the powerful gain their wealth and power through the labor of the workers, not through their own personal effort. Furthermore, God does not want people to be resigned to oppression at the hands of a new pharaoh who is proud and miserly; rather, God wants people’s actions to be works of love that serve to create their own liberation. “The New World will be born from the hands of the peasants.”⁶¹

The “Song of Peace/Agnus Dei” articulates an important insight of the liberation theology perspective, namely, that God suffers in the suffering of the people. The first verse offers a political analysis of Jesus’ suffering on the cross by interpreting his suffering as “denouncing the unjust oppressor and raising the poor from the dust.” The second verse bridges the chronological gap by explaining that just as Jesus was tortured on the cross by the powerful, “he spills his blood again today in the blood of our fallen ones.” The third verse states that Jesus builds peace with justice and asks him to “help us persist in the struggle for the coming of the kingdom.” Although the canonical text concludes simply with “grant us peace,” Cuéllar

⁶¹ Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 24.

emphasizes the people's responsibility to act by applying a condition to this request: "may your peace reach us *when we have made justice well up.*"⁶²

Conclusion

Phillip Berryman cautiously points out that throughout the 1970s the pastoral agents who were committed to liberation theology were always a minority. Although some clergy were staunch traditionalists who opposed Vatican II and Medellín, most were modernizers who supported changes in the liturgy and spiritual practices but did not understand the task of struggling with the poor for a more just society to be central to the Christian faith.⁶³ Despite their relatively small numbers, the liberation theologians and the pastoral agents who brought this vision to life had a significant impact on the revolutionary movements in both Nicaragua and El Salvador. Linking the political struggle against tyrannical governments with the religiously inspired drive for justice, these individuals sought liberation using the words of the Church translated into the language of the people.

Liturgist José De Luca writes, "It is not possible to have liberating worship if the community that performs the cultic act does not struggle concretely with contemporary society to reestablish (inharmonious human) relationships that are engendered by marginalizing injustice."⁶⁴ In the *Misa campesina nicaragüense* and the *Misa popular salvadoreña*, Mejía Godoy and Cuéllar engage in the struggle identified by De Luca as they grapple with the realities of oppression and present liberating visions for the people of Nicaragua and El Salvador. Because the Church had been coopted by the powerful so often in the histories of their countries, their Masses replace canonical language with a language of liberation that names the

⁶² Vigil and Torrellas, *Misas centro americanas*, 25. Italics are mine.

⁶³ Berryman, *Stubborn Hope*, 13-14.

⁶⁴ Mora Guevara, *La celebración Cristiana*, 34.

particularities of the people's experience as they cry out for justice. The struggles of the moment, however, are never given the last word. The Masses envision a future of transformation, equality, justice, peace, and joy, and they endeavor to incarnate it in the present through the struggle and song of the community.

Chapter 2

From the Subjugating Empire to a Call for

“Memória, remorso, compromisso! /Memory, remorse, commitment!”⁶⁵

From the earliest arrival of Europeans in the Americas, evangelization, political domination, and economic exploitation have walked hand in hand. Armed with the theology of the Church, the conquistadors used force to justify the search for riches and territory and to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. Over five centuries later, many people of indigenous heritage in Latin America are Christians. Given this history of abuse and the fact that these individuals are no longer forced to identify as Christians, it is reasonable to ask why they choose to maintain this religious commitment.

This chapter examines the conflicted relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and oppressed communities in Latin America. While many indigenous people choose to maintain their ties to Christianity, the question remains whether Christianity is empowering for them or whether, as a cultural export of Europe with a history of subjugating violence, it contributes to their further marginalization. This chapter considers the legacy of abuses perpetrated by the Church as well as pastoral efforts to claim responsibility for the wrongs of the past and to contribute to healthier, more life-affirming alternatives.

The first section explores the arrival of Christianity in the Americas by analyzing the role of evangelization within the political and economic process of colonization and by highlighting the role of Bartolomé de las Casas, one of the earliest advocates for indigenous peoples. The second section introduces the pastoral practice of inculturation through the work of Diego Irarrázaval, who suggests that Christianity must be incarnated anew through the worldviews and

⁶⁵ Pedro Casaldáliga and Pedro Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males” (liturgy), *Servicios Koinonia*, accessed January 12, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426042307/http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/Casaldaliga/poesia/terra.htm>.

cultures of each sector of society if it is to conform to the message of the gospel. The third section traces the career of Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, who experienced a call to walk in solidarity with indigenous communities in rural Brazil and to challenge the Church to ask forgiveness for its racist and colonizing attitudes and behaviors toward the indigenous peoples. The final section is an analysis of the *Missa da terra sem males* (Mass of the Land without Evil) written by Casaldáliga and his collaborators and first performed in São Paulo, Brazil on April 22, 1979. This Mass is an acknowledgement of guilt on the part of the Church, and an expression of remorse and of commitment to walk in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Brazil and of all of Latin America in the future.

The Era of Conquest

The role of the Church in the devastation and demographic collapse that took place in the Americas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is well known. As the Spanish and Portuguese nations conquered and colonized territory in the Americas, the salvation of souls was their primary justification for the political process of domination.⁶⁶ In 1493, Pope Alexander VI granted the Spanish monarchs the exclusive responsibility for converting to Christianity the indigenous peoples of the newly discovered lands, and the following year Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Tordesillas dividing the non-Christian world between the two countries.⁶⁷ These transactions took place among Europeans without the knowledge or consent of the peoples living on these lands.⁶⁸ Although influential Church leaders disagreed profoundly about the

⁶⁶ Luis N. Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 24.

⁶⁷ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 25.

⁶⁸ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 29.

means to achieve their ends, they were unanimous in the convenient belief that the conversion of the indigenous peoples rationalized the quest for political domination and the pursuit of wealth.⁶⁹

In his book *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas*, Luis Rivera Pagán documents the diversity and contradictions among the Spanish perspectives that debated the legitimacy of the Empire.⁷⁰ Although conquistadors and colonists alike appealed to the rhetoric of missionary zeal, some theologians decried the hypocrisy of the operative tactic of saving souls while abusing bodies. Rivera Pagán identifies two approaches to effect the conversion of the indigenous peoples: evangelizing conquest and missionary action. The first seeks dominion over the peoples, achieved by force if necessary, to facilitate evangelization; the second draws on persuasion by reasonable arguments and preaching and attraction by the example of a dedicated Christian life that excludes violence.⁷¹ Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas in the debates of Valladolid in 1550-51 famously argued these positions. Sepúlveda believed that the indigenous peoples should be forced to accept Christianity and Spanish domination. He explains: “Those who go away from the Christian religion wander on the path of error and walk toward a sure precipice, unless even against their will we retrieve them by whatever means possible... Thus I affirm that those barbarians should not only be invited, but also compelled to do good, that is to be just and religious.”⁷²

Arguing the other side, the noted advocate for the indigenous peoples, Dominican friar Las Casas, insisted that the fact that the indigenous peoples were not Christians was not sufficient justification for Spain to dispossess them of their land or political sovereignty.⁷³ For

⁶⁹ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, xv.

⁷⁰ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, xiv.

⁷¹ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 156, 226.

⁷² Quoted in Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 219.

⁷³ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 68.

Las Casas, the only legitimate way to evangelize the indigenous peoples was peaceful persuasion that would inspire them to accept freely both Christianity and the dominion of the Spanish Crown.⁷⁴ Similarly, Dominican theologian Francisco de Vitoria believed that the pope's authority had jurisdiction only over Christian individuals and nations. For these reasons, the friars believed that conversion could not be forced upon the indigenous peoples and that their unwillingness to convert could not be considered a legitimate cause for war.⁷⁵

Historical accounts of the “discovery” written by Europeans have generally emphasized the role of disease and lack of immunity as the reasons for the demographic collapse of the indigenous peoples. As early as the sixteenth century, Las Casas argued against this oversimplification of the causes of mortality. He documented many elements that contributed to the deaths caused by illness, including the food shortages created by the breakdown of agriculture due to war and mining, the exhaustion caused by forced labor, the lack of care for the sick, and the overcrowding in homes and work situations that facilitated contagion.⁷⁶ Despite the documentation of the social context of the epidemics by Las Casas and many of his contemporaries, few modern historians have dealt critically with this account, preferring the strictly biological explanation.⁷⁷

Rivera Pagán explains that, upon the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, discovery and expropriation became concurrent acts.⁷⁸ Acts of abuse including the rape of women, forced labor, cruel treatment, and seizure of precious metals, occurred within a context of forced subordination. He explains, “Suddenly, the inhabitants of these lands, without any mediating

⁷⁴ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 69.

⁷⁵ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 79.

⁷⁶ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 176.

⁷⁷ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 179.

⁷⁸ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 7.

negotiations, found themselves under imposed subordination, and were informed in various ways of their new nature as *owned beings*.⁷⁹ In addition, Rivera Pagán draws an important connection between the devaluing of indigenous religious traditions and the demographic collapse of the indigenous population of the Americas in the sixteenth century. Noting that the task of preserving the collective religious memory binds a community together, he suggests that eradicating a people's spiritual worldview—a source of values, ideals, and meaning—has devastating consequences on their potential for human survival. He asks, "If our gods have been dethroned and uprooted, if our myths have become the object of scorn and unrelenting criticism, has life any meaning and value?"⁸⁰

For Las Casas the contradictions between his missionary vision based on attraction and persuasion and the concrete reality of the oppression of indigenous communities called into question the legitimacy of the European presence in the Americas.⁸¹ The ultimate goal of the salvation of souls could not justify the present tyrannies of an oppressive regime. For Las Casas, the actions of the conquistadors and colonists were quite simply sinful.⁸² Wrestling with the political and social dimensions of sin, Las Casas saw violence against the indigenous peoples as an offense against God and as a new crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.⁸³ The contradictions between the stated intentions and actions of the Church with respect to indigenous communities have remained problematic. Historian Samuel Silva Gotay writes:

Here you can find in Latin America a profound line of theological continuity arising when Christianity, transplanted by conquerors, friars, and colonists, becomes the religion of the victors and the faith of the victims. That double function of legitimization and

⁷⁹ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 12. Italics in the original.

⁸⁰ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 166.

⁸¹ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 47.

⁸² Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 245.

⁸³ Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 246.

denunciation becomes the historical matrix for Latin American theological debates, always characterized by a vital urgency absent from the theoretical abstractions of other regions.⁸⁴

This dual legacy endures as an active question, particularly for Christians of indigenous heritage in Latin America today.

Inculturation: A Challenge to the Church

Diego Irarrázaval is a Roman Catholic priest of the Congregation of the Holy Cross who has worked for decades as a missionary in just such indigenous communities in Peru and Chile. He was the president of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) from 2001-06 and served as director of the Institute for Aymaran Studies from 1981-2006. His book, *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America*, argues on behalf of implementing the practice of inculturation that was promoted by the Second Vatican Council, the meetings of the Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano (CELAM, the Latin American Episcopal Council), and, in particular, by the CELAM meeting in Santo Domingo held in 1992.

This proposed practice of inculturation allows each cultural group to engage with the gospel informally and to elaborate a response to it through the everyday activities, rituals, and ethics of its community.⁸⁵ Rather than imposing a uniform body of Church doctrine on a community, inculturated practice allows the community to respond to the Christian message out of the particularities of its experience.⁸⁶ In this way Christianity does not separate people from their realities but urges them to engage more fully in their social and cultural contexts.⁸⁷ From

⁸⁴ Quoted in Rivera, *Violent Evangelism*, 267.

⁸⁵ Diego Irarrázaval, *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 9.

⁸⁶ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 11.

⁸⁷ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 30.

the standpoint of ministry, inculturated practice emphasizes listening, seeing, and sharing in the life of the community rather than instructing or imposing values or behaviors.⁸⁸

Irarrázaval documents the trends in missionary activities over the past few decades by describing the radical evolution of his personal understanding of ministry:

My first experience was as a layman in a peasant settlement in Talca, Chile; I sought to teach those who were “ignorant.” Later on, as a religious in urban settings, I took on the standpoint of evangelizing through consciousness-raising and the observe-judge-act method. Today, with indigenous, farmers, and small merchants (in Chucuito, Peru) I understand mission as accompaniment and celebration.⁸⁹

The strength of inculturated practice is that it enables people to experience a Christianity that is consonant with their own cultures and histories.⁹⁰ Irarrázaval draws on the work of Indian artist and theologian Jyoti Sahi who explains that the goal of inculturation is not converting others but “creating a wholeness in oneself.” Sahi describes inculturation as a process of creative expression that enables Christians to express themselves within the local church in ways that are faithful to their particular history and culture.⁹¹

Irarrázaval believes that such practices are mostly alien to communities in Latin America that have been and remain religiously colonized. He explains:

For centuries we have been given a Christianity that was colonizing and (recently) one “adapted” to us. We have been regarded as objects of actions performed by members of “superior” societies. That is why we must decolonize, take on the faith within our cultural journeys... We also ought to stop depending on centers that claim a monopoly over what is religious, exercise our right to be Christians led by the Spirit, and courageously reaffirm our own ways.⁹²

⁸⁸ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 51.

⁸⁹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 57.

⁹⁰ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 42.

⁹¹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 42.

⁹² Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 27.

In the Andes in particular, Irarrázaval finds that representations of God lack the characteristic colors, flavors, and melodies of the region, leaving Christianity chained to images chosen by the colonizers.⁹³ In addition, because it is taught from the dominant perspective, Christianity runs the risk of promoting characteristics particular to the elite. Regulation of the sacrament of ordination institutionalizes male privilege; images of Christ, Mary, and the saints that depict falsely white phenotypes for biblical and historical figures of various ethnic backgrounds promote white superiority; and church practices uphold and endorse societal values of individualism and pride in material accomplishments.⁹⁴ These attributes are often absorbed uncritically as one generation passes on the Christian faith to the next. The association of each of these characteristics with the sacred is profoundly dehumanizing to those who are different and whose cultural outlook leads them to experience life differently. On the other hand, if God can be represented in forms that are consistent with the cultural life of small communities in the Andes, then Christianity can be a source of empowerment and a medium for resistance to marginalization.

Irarrázaval believes that the example of Jesus recorded in the Christian scriptures can motivate marginalized people to resist such dehumanization. He explains that Jesus interacts and enters into dialogue with people from all walks of life but chooses to attend most closely to the marginalized: women, children, and those who are sick or suffering. “Jesus,” he claims, “can be said to opt culturally for people who are supposedly ignorant.”⁹⁵ Likewise, Jesus comes into conflict with those who see themselves as authorities, upholding and promoting the dominant social and religious culture. Irarrázaval compares the scriptural paradigm to the Latin American

⁹³ Irarrázaval, *Inculuration*, 95.

⁹⁴ Irarrázaval, *Inculuration*, 75.

⁹⁵ Irarrázaval, *Inculuration*, 45.

situation in which religious teaching has traditionally been imposed hierarchically from the top down. Those who are deemed insignificant—women, young people, blacks, indigenous, mestizos—are not seen as competent Christian voices despite scriptural precedent. Given that the biblical message highlights the role of those who are dismissed in the dominant culture, Irarrázaval asks, “Why is mission often headed by the ‘educated’ from the upper-middle and upper classes?” and answers, “We are inconsistent.”⁹⁶ Inculturated practice, he believes, offers a way to reverse that trend and begin from marginalized positions in order to challenge dominant thinking.⁹⁷

Irarrázaval notes that people often operate out of multiple worldviews simultaneously, combining elements that “enable them to survive better.”⁹⁸ He describes this syncretism that characterizes popular religion as “a symbiosis that combines things that serve life.”⁹⁹ The problem with the traditional missionary model is not that it is introducing a new symbol system, but that those being evangelized are forced to adopt that symbol system to the exclusion of their own, rather than choosing to integrate the two in meaningful and life-affirming ways. For Irarrázaval this is spiritual and human aggression.¹⁰⁰ If the Church maintains its historical practice of insisting on a single-culture stance, the religious practices of those who operate in multiple belief systems will always be seen as unacceptable expressions of polytheism or superstition that deviate from the accepted truth.¹⁰¹ Irarrázaval believes that within the Catholic

⁹⁶ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 63.

⁹⁷ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 46.

⁹⁸ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 75.

⁹⁹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 75.

¹⁰⁰ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 76.

¹⁰¹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 3.

tradition there can be a variety of paths.¹⁰² Belief in Christ, he explains, does not mean “that ‘they’ are to abandon what they are and become like ‘us.’ ”¹⁰³

Those in positions of ecclesiastical authority often view popular religion as tainted, impure, or incomplete. Irarrázaval does not see the Christianities that evolve in communities of mixed symbolic systems as false or polytheistic. He refuses to subscribe to the colonial logic that would see them as the “realm of the devil” or modern logic that sees them as ignorant and superstitious.¹⁰⁴ In their capacity for meaningful integration, he sees people constructing their lives by obtaining meaningful resources from different cultural arrangements.¹⁰⁵ He firmly believes that the Christian tradition can be reread in continuity with indigenous belief systems.

Irarrázaval describes the beliefs of the indigenous communities with which he has worked over the years as cosmic because he feels that term best describes the holistic approach with which they transform the Christian tradition. As indigenous communities engage with Christianity, they de-Westernize it and center it within the worldviews of their local cultures.¹⁰⁶ In order to minister effectively in these communities, Irarrázaval feels he must encourage the diverse belief systems to intertwine. He writes, “Here, the church’s inculturating action is not a matter of replacing what is called the natural way of life, but rather rediscovering the holistic and cosmic factor in the Good News.”¹⁰⁷ This process is one that will necessitate a reconceptualization of Catholicism in Latin America.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 2.

¹⁰³ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 22.

¹⁰⁴ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 85.

¹⁰⁵ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 78.

¹⁰⁶ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 3.

Among the current trends in Latin American Christianity, Irarrázaval recognizes a desire to confront the growth of secularism. In some instances, Christian fundamentalisms arise in an effort to keep the pressures of modern life at bay, designating a religious sphere that can be kept separate from insecurity.¹⁰⁹ In other cases, people strive to establish a more overtly Christian society. While its proponents claim that a culture permeated by faith will be more human, Irarrázaval sees a desire to return to the monolithic Christianity of the era of colonization in this proposal.¹¹⁰ The Christendom of the colonial era would be replaced with the neo-Christendom of modernity.¹¹¹ For Irarrázaval a “homogenized, uniformity-seeking ‘Christianity’ ” is inconsistent with the Christian belief in the incarnation, in which the Divine took on human form in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.¹¹² Following Irarrázaval’s logic, if Christ accepted the scandal of particularity by taking on human form, the Church needs to embrace the Christianities that arise out of the experiences of particular communities and to set aside “timeless and spaceless notions of faith.”¹¹³ Although God is transcendent, people primarily apprehend God through their particular experiences in daily life. Irarrázaval explains, “Hence, the church is not called to impose any Christendom, or neo-Christendom, or any ‘modern Christian culture.’ Rather, it is a sacrament, so that each people—with its culture and religion—may find the truth and be transformed by the love of God.”¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 23.

¹¹⁰ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 6.

¹¹¹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 29.

¹¹² Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 29.

¹¹³ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 29.

¹¹⁴ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 25. As a Catholic priest and a missionary, Irarrázaval professes a deep faith and desire to promote a life-giving Catholicism. Although he is an ardent supporter of inculturation, of allowing each community to engage and express their Christianity in the language and mode that is most meaningful for them, his own language speaks of the salvation of Christ for the *whole* world. He is careful to state that his task is not one of proselytization, and he freely acknowledges the truth claims made by those who adhere to other religious

Irarrázaval finds that in the indigenous communities with which he has worked there is distrust of modern rationality. Modernity promises an endless supply of goods but fails to recognize that this mode of consumption is unsustainable. More pressingly, most people are not in a position to access or enjoy the gains offered by the modern project.¹¹⁵ From a religious standpoint, Irarrázaval criticizes modernity for absolutizing (and therefore idolizing) things that do not grant happiness.¹¹⁶ He finds that the market has a totalitarian presence that forces its way into the thoughts and behaviors of each community.¹¹⁷ He explains, “even though the poor are dependent on, and even subservient to, the powerful, they are suspicious of the existing institutional order (given its ineffectiveness and inhumanity) and question it.”¹¹⁸

Sociologist Cristián Parker uses the term “hemidernal” (semi-modern) to describe the many groups of people in South America who have a conflicted relationship with modernity. Following Parker, Irarrázaval explains that hemidernal people “assume modernity, and yet they also question it and surpass it.”¹¹⁹

Promoting inculturation affirms the modes of living that exist outside modern rationality. Inculturation challenges the monolithic modern project by acknowledging and valuing diverse modes of imaginatively constructing the world, valuing people and resources, and behaving in it. By embracing traditional ways of living, people of marginalized communities “implicitly question a modernity that plunders nature and splits persons.”¹²⁰ The Church’s task in

traditions. I find a tension, however, between his desire for a freely-expressed, polycentric Catholic faith and language that assumes that all religious traditions can be subsumed into a single spiritual quest.

¹¹⁵ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 2.

¹¹⁶ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 22.

¹¹⁷ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 111-2.

¹¹⁸ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 107.

¹¹⁹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 108.

accompanying those who operate from a different worldview is not to impose a universally “Christian” mode of thinking and behaving, but to offer Christian sources in such a way that they can be reread in various cultural contexts. In this effort, the Church can stand with marginalized communities who resist the totalizing effects of modern rationality.¹²¹

A Church Repenting

Roman Catholic bishop Pedro Casaldáliga, a significant exponent of liberation theology in Brazil, devoted his life’s work precisely to such standing in solidarity with marginalized communities. In the 1970s the cause of the indigenous peoples began to take on a new urgency for him. His work in rural areas in the interior of Brazil had brought him into contact with people in dire poverty, but he began to realize that the indigenous peoples lived in even more desperate conditions. As a leader in the Church, he began to acknowledge the ways in which religious language contributed to the further marginalization of indigenous communities, and he resolved to be a voice for change. For Casaldáliga, disrupting the colonizing dynamic that has existed for centuries between the Church and indigenous peoples requires the Church to ask for forgiveness from the indigenous peoples. To that end, he co-wrote the *Missa da terra sem males* (Mass of the Land without Evil). But this interest had roots much earlier in his life.

Pedro Casaldáliga was born in 1928 on a modest dairy farm in the fiercely independent Catalonia region of Spain.¹²² His family cherished their Catholic identity, and one of Casaldáliga’s uncles was a priest. When he was eleven years old, Casaldáliga chose to pursue a vocation as a priest, and while in seminary he decided to become a missionary.¹²³ During the

¹²⁰ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 20.

¹²¹ Irarrázaval, *Inculturation*, 20.

¹²² Pedro Casaldáliga, *I Believe in Justice and Hope*, trans. Joseph C. Daries (Notre Dame: Fides/Claretian, 1978), 9.

¹²³ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 12, 14.

Spanish Civil War the Casaldáliga family, prompted by their strong religious convictions, supported the right-wing Nationalists.¹²⁴ Yet Casaldáliga explains in his autobiography, *I Believe in Justice and Hope*, that after the war had ended and the initial euphoria had passed, he began to “distinguish between the right-wing and religion, between being Catholic and living the faith.”¹²⁵ He describes religion as “something mixed and impure” and states that one has to “distinguish between the cross and the sword.”¹²⁶

Casaldáliga describes his process of conscientization from the faith of his youth and his seminary training as “a very slow process and highly conditioned awakening.”¹²⁷ His family’s Catalonian roots, however, may have predisposed him to adopt a critical attitude toward colonial practices and prompted him to recognize the ways in which culture can be imposed under the guise of religion. When he describes the Catholic Action group he joined in his teens, he claims he participated “even if it did seem a bit Castilian, a bit imported.”¹²⁸

Casaldáliga’s first missionary assignment was to what was then the colony of Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea).¹²⁹ In Africa he began to perceive a notion of the transformation needed in order for the Church to serve genuinely in the Third World.¹³⁰ In 1968 he was assigned to the rural Brazilian state of Mato Grosso in the heart of the South American continent. In his autobiography he describes how his experiences there kindled a deep commitment to the poor

¹²⁴ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 9-10.

¹²⁵ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 148.

¹²⁶ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 149.

¹²⁷ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 203.

¹²⁸ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 149.

¹²⁹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 19.

¹³⁰ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 19.

and underserved people of Brazil. He was appointed a bishop in 1971, continued to work in Brazil until his retirement in 2003, and lives there still.

In his diary Casaldáliga describes the impressions and experiences of his arrival in rural Brazil. He describes Mato Grosso as a place with “more dying and killing than there is living,” and the people of Mato Grosso as nomads driven from one area to another seeking the means for survival.¹³¹ Promised steady employment by the owners of large ranches, manual laborers from other parts of the country would leave their homes and arrive to encounter conditions that he describes as little better than concentration camps.¹³² Casaldáliga began to recognize in the suffering faces, “who come and go on the winds of poverty, loneliness, their own crimes or those of others,” the poor of the gospel, and he began to acknowledge what he emphatically referred to as “the collective crime of social injustice!”¹³³ He claims it was the continuous suffering of the people—poor health, lack of proper sanitation, unemployment, illiteracy, social marginalization—that forced him and his fellow missionaries to overhaul their preconceived ministerial vision and to dedicate themselves to living in solidarity with the community.¹³⁴ He writes, “All of this contributed to make us review and restate all the formation we had received, the piety we had inherited... our sedentary, rectory-bound ministries, the ease with which we of the ‘Old World’ had allowed ourselves to be convinced of the necessity for maintaining the dichotomy between the mission of the church and politics and society in general.”¹³⁵

Casaldáliga grew increasingly critical of the governance and legal system that served only to uphold the interests of wealthy landowners. He writes, “The people continue to be

¹³¹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 35.

¹³² Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 32-3.

¹³³ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 28.

¹³⁴ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 28, 30.

¹³⁵ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 26.

without land and without any hope of land, their rights and aspirations trampled on by official policy and the privileges of the great, which are one and the same thing.”¹³⁶ In June of 1974 he published a paper, “The Cause, and Hope, Continue,” in which he criticizes the diplomacy that “only safeguards the interests of the rich” and rejects negotiations “carried on by third parties at the top of the pyramid, when the base, the people—who ought to come first—have neither a place nor a voice in the dialogue.”¹³⁷

He came to see capitalism as an inherently oppressive system and to recognize the need for the oppressed classes to struggle for their freedom.¹³⁸ The Brazilian government was too heavily beholden to the interests of the wealthy landowners to be trusted to rein in the injustices perpetrated in the quest for the control of ever-increasing tracts of land. For Casaldáliga this situation required the poor communities to take responsibility for promoting their own interests. He writes: “No oppressive government is going to free the oppressed!”¹³⁹ Even if the political will had existed to alter the situation on behalf of the poor, Casaldáliga saw the government as largely impotent: “My opinion, for what it’s worth, is that neither Geisel [the Brazilian president from 1974-79] nor his government nor this régime gives the orders. The ‘system’ is prior and superior to them, and the system gives the orders: the designedly capitalistic, diabolically multinational, and strategically ‘Latin American’ system.”¹⁴⁰

While governments (and church authorities) promoted peace, law, and order, Casaldáliga, like his fellow bishop, Dom Hélder Câmara, saw through this discourse and identified it as hypocrisy. Following Câmara’s analysis in *The Spiral of Violence*, Casaldáliga describes the first

¹³⁶ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 124.

¹³⁷ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 124, 126.

¹³⁸ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 49.

¹³⁹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 49.

¹⁴⁰ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 142.

kind of violence as the “institutionalized, officially justified, diplomatically tolerated and dialogued sort” that creates an environment of systematic oppression.¹⁴¹ This violence is unrecognized and unacknowledged in the pronouncements of the authorities. The violence that is denounced by those in power is secondary, according to Câmara, and arises in response to the suffering caused by the system. Casaldáliga rejects the false peace promoted by the authorities, claiming “There is no real peace without truth and justice. Any other kind of ‘peace’ is nothing but a lie, a form of hypocritical exploitation (or cowardly conniving).”¹⁴² A false peace, he insists, would be worse than the worst war.¹⁴³ Even the term *nonviolence* is problematic because it is always understood in relationship to violence, and Casaldáliga suggests replacing talk of nonviolence with talk of justice and just means.¹⁴⁴

For Casaldáliga, it was his encounter with God in the midst of the community of faith that motivated and sustained his ability to work long years under difficult conditions. He describes this as an overwhelming mystery that forced him “to believe that God is bigger than all our hearts, our dogmas, and our communities.”¹⁴⁵ While work in the thick of communal life requires listening, dialogue, service, and “walking elbow-to-elbow with others,” it offers the reward of “the wonders of grace” and the intimate experience of God.¹⁴⁶

As Casaldáliga and his fellow missionaries made visits to get acquainted with the people of Mato Grosso, they were overwhelmed by the conditions of poverty and by their sense of responsibility. He writes, “In every house we visited, we were met with the same affection and

¹⁴¹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 213. See also Hélder Câmara, *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1971).

¹⁴² Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 74-5.

¹⁴³ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 126.

¹⁴⁴ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 214.

¹⁴⁵ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 176.

trust (indeed, too much trust in “the Padres”), and the same misery (sickness, lack of sanitation, insecurity). My heart was choking with rage and compassion, welling up into a tense prayer, a cry.”¹⁴⁷ While inspired by the generosity and compassion with which the people of the community treated their neighbors, Casaldáliga felt the weight of the responsibility that embracing their cause and standing in solidarity with them would entail.¹⁴⁸

Although at first reluctant to accept Pope John XXIII, Casaldáliga soon realized that the Second Vatican Council had great potential for calling the Church to deeper integrity and more effective service in the world.¹⁴⁹ Among the Council’s successes, he highlights efforts to demythologize the Church as an institution by conceding that it is not the only locus of salvation and the acknowledgement, however tentative, of the wrongs committed by the Church throughout history.¹⁵⁰ Yet he is also quick to point out that Vatican II is not the last word and was not able to overturn centuries of hierarchism, clericalism, and “ecclesiastical *machismo*.” He writes, “Even today... laymen—let alone women—are ‘generously’ tolerated. When they are admitted to an Assembly or to some post, they are not accepted as equals... We are rabidly clerical and hierarchical. We deceive ourselves so easily about our benevolent concessions.”¹⁵¹

Casaldáliga insists that his criticism of the Church is motivated by his love for it and his desire for it to be faithful to its mission.¹⁵² The first step in making positive changes, he claims, must be an unflinching look at present failings. Among the problems he identifies are the demand for uncritical obedience, the false distinction between religious poverty and the

¹⁴⁷ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 95.

¹⁴⁸ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 82.

¹⁴⁹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 174.

¹⁵⁰ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 175.

¹⁵¹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 175-6.

¹⁵² Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 170.

collective wealth of the institution, the avoidance of serious social problems in favor of ‘prudent’ assessment and diplomacy, and the alignment of the Church with the wealthy and powerful.¹⁵³

On this last point he writes, “Ratifying injustice is an all too ‘Catholic’ sin. In this, the church has been guilty for many centuries now. She ought to admit it, deplore it, and become converted.”¹⁵⁴

At the ceremony of his installation as bishop, Casaldáliga opted against wearing the traditional miter, crozier, and ring. In their stead, he chose the *sertanejo* straw hat worn by the local people and a wooden walking stick carved by the Tapirapé Indians; the episcopal ring he sent to his mother in Spain.¹⁵⁵ Fearing that his promotion in the Church ranks would draw him away from what he saw as his essential mission of accompanying the people of his community, he writes, “I reaffirmed my irrevocable decision to follow the people... into exile, if they were ever deported. And I would not let my episcopal office stand in the way...”¹⁵⁶ Likewise, even though he accepted with reluctance a position that would place him among those “on top,” he recommitted himself to listening to the voices speaking “from the bottom.”¹⁵⁷

Casaldáliga came to believe that service in the Church required a commitment to the lifestyle of the local community, which meant adopting their modes of housing, food, and dress in an effort to share in their struggles and hopes.¹⁵⁸ He explains that the people are admirable in their search for justice, and that pastoral agents “can and ought to accompany them, to join them on the road... without having to shamefacedly gloss over the gratuitous power of the faith which

¹⁵³ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 44, 171-2.

¹⁵⁴ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 45.

¹⁵⁵ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 47, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 46.

¹⁵⁷ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 192.

¹⁵⁸ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 179.

we Christians possess—or rather, which possesses us.”¹⁵⁹ If the people are without land and rights, then the leaders of the Church ought to join them in their exile and struggle.¹⁶⁰ For Casaldáliga the task is to overcome the “heaven/earth dichotomy between a church that walks in the clouds and a humanity that steps into mud-puddles” if the Church is to contribute meaningfully to the lives of people who are poor.¹⁶¹

As they strove to walk with the local communities, Casaldáliga and his fellow missionaries also faced the intractability of systemic oppression. Their work was unlikely to offer quick successes or yield dramatic results, and at times they felt overwhelmed by the impression that the people had been “trapped in a dead-end street.”¹⁶² With painful honesty Casaldáliga writes, “I am the personification of tormented powerlessness.”¹⁶³ He could envision the people of his diocese healthy and thriving, but he could do painfully little to make that dream a reality.

As Casaldáliga worked with the many marginalized groups in Mato Grosso in the early 1970s, the cause of the indigenous peoples of the region began to resonate strongly with him. In a particularly poignant passage of his book Casaldáliga describes his experience of conscientization:

The awakening of Africa won me over to its cause, and unmasked for me the camouflaged colonialisms that I once thought of as discovery and evangelization. America was no longer just one more glory of Spain’s great navigators... I knew about the hunger, the illiteracy, and the exploitation of the New World and of the whole Third World and its people, by the first and second worlds... Since then I have fully grasped and felt the whole rotten myth of racist superiority, divinely-decreed eminent domain and

¹⁵⁹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 137.

¹⁶⁰ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 133.

¹⁶¹ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 188-89.

¹⁶² Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 138.

¹⁶³ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 37.

inhuman exploitation that has gone into the discovery, colonization, and at times, even the evangelization of the New World.¹⁶⁴

In 1974 he and many of the missionaries signed a manifesto in defense of the indigenous peoples called *Y-Juca-Pirama* (“He Who Must Die”).¹⁶⁵ While official government rhetoric urged indigenous communities to be integrated into the national community, Casaldáliga saw these policies as “disintegrating integration,” aimed at exterminating the indigenous communities, and he began to advocate for self-determination of the tribal nations and official recognition of claims to territory and indigenous languages.¹⁶⁶

In 1976 Casaldáliga wrote a penitential litany for the funeral of two missionaries and four Bororo Indians who were murdered by landholders encroaching on a small village in Mato Grosso. In the litany Casaldáliga addresses the collective wrongs that the Church must repair in its relationship with the indigenous peoples.¹⁶⁷ The litany begins:

For all the sins of the old and new colonization that for centuries has been crushing the native peoples of our America, we ask forgiveness. (*Forgive us, Lord, forgive us.*)
For the sins of the church itself, so often an instrument of colonialism, old and new...
For the pride and ignorance with which we show contempt for the culture of native peoples, in the name of a civilization hypocritically called Christian...
For the plundering of the Indians’ lands and the destruction of the natural environment in which they live, a plundering done for the benefit of those with large landholdings, the interests of the large national or multinational companies, or by insensitive tourism...¹⁶⁸

This litany begins to develop the ideas and the tone that Casaldáliga would use in the remarkable *Missa da terra sem males* that would debut three years later.

¹⁶⁴ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 204-5.

¹⁶⁵ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 122.

¹⁶⁶ Casaldáliga, *Justice and Hope*, 143. See also Pedro Casaldáliga, *In Pursuit of the Kingdom: Writings: 1968-1988* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 57.

¹⁶⁷ Casaldáliga, *Pursuit*, 61.

¹⁶⁸ Casaldáliga, *Pursuit*, 61.

Missa da terra sem males

The Brazilian bishops declared the year 1978 to be the Year of the Martyrs of the Indigenous Cause to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the death of three Jesuit martyrs, Roque González, Afonso Rodriguez, and João Castilho, who had died in Rio Grande do Sul, the southernmost Brazilian state. In response to the bishops' declaration, the Conselho Indigenista Missionário (Indigenous Missionary Council) protested that it was unjust to commemorate only the deaths of the three Jesuits when so many more had perished during the missionizing process carried out in the name of the Christian Empires of Spain and Portugal.¹⁶⁹

Brother Antônio Cechin of the Marist order, an author of indigenous histories, first imagined the *Missa da terra sem males* (Mass of the Land without Evil) during a visit to the ruins of São Miguel of the Rio Grande do Sul, the site of an eighteenth-century massacre of Guarani people by joint Spanish and Portuguese forces.¹⁷⁰ Cechin suggested the project to Casaldáliga who embraced it readily and chose as collaborators the poet Pedro Tierra and the composer Martín Coplas.

Pedro Tierra is the pseudonym of Hamilton Pereira da Silva, a longtime political activist and more recently Brazilian public official.¹⁷¹ In the late 1960s Tierra joined the organization Ação Libertadora Nacional (National Liberation Movement) and began fighting against the military dictatorship that had taken power in 1964. He was arrested, tortured, and held as a political prisoner from 1972 to 1977.¹⁷² During his years in prison, he adopted the pseudonym Pedro Tierra in order to publish his poetry and other writings. Friends sent Tierra's poetry to

¹⁶⁹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

¹⁷⁰ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

¹⁷¹ Leonhard Creutzberg, "Pedro Tierra," *Portal Luteranos*, last modified June 29, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426043001/http://www.luteranos.com.br/conteudo/pedro-tierra-1948>.

¹⁷² Creutzberg, "Pedro Tierra."

Europe to be published, then sold collections of his works to raise funds for the opposition movement in Brazil.¹⁷³ Over the decades since his release from prison, Tierra has held a variety of public and political positions that include founder of the Sindicatos de Trabalhadores Rurais (Syndicate for Rural Workers), executive director of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party), Secretary of Culture for the Federal District, and president of a foundation for the education of Brazilian workers. More recently he has been named to the Ministry for the Environment in 2007 and appointed assessor for the National Water Agency in 2010.¹⁷⁴

Martín Coplas is a composer from Argentina who traces his ancestry to both the Quechua and Aymara peoples. He specializes in folk music traditions and is particularly interested in the exchange among various folk styles. He has lived in southern Brazil for decades because he appreciates the ways in which folk traditions mingle at the border between the areas colonized by the Portuguese and the Spanish.¹⁷⁵ Leonhard Creutzberg, who writes the commentary for the Brazilian Lutheran hymnal, suggests that Coplas may be a pseudonym since the term *coplas* is used to describe verses or quatrains in folk songs.¹⁷⁶

Throughout his career, Coplas has been involved in organizing and participating in folk music festivals. He has toured extensively through the interior of Brazil and performed with many prominent musicians in the *gaucho* tradition. It was perhaps during one of these tours that Casaldáliga first made his acquaintance. The collaboration between Coplas and Casaldáliga

¹⁷³ Creutzberg, “Pedro Tierra.”

¹⁷⁴ Creutzberg, “Pedro Tierra.”

¹⁷⁵ Leonhard Creutzberg, “Martin Coplas,” *Portal Luteranos*, last modified June 29, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426042641/http://www.luteranos.com.br/conteudo/martin-coplas>.

¹⁷⁶ Creutzberg, “Martin Coplas.”

continued beyond the *Missa da terra sem males*, and in 1985 they wrote a Christmas oratorio entitled “E o Verbo se fez Índio” (And the Word became Indian).¹⁷⁷

The *Missa da terra sem males* was premiered at the Cathedral of Sé in São Paulo on April 22, 1979 at a Mass celebrated by almost forty bishops. A thirty-minute film version produced by Verbo Filmes intersperses footage from the premiere with scenes from a Paraguayan Guarani village.¹⁷⁸ In 2010 the *Missa* was performed at a symposium entitled *The Missionary Experience: Territory, Culture and Identity* held at a university in São Leopoldo, Brazil.¹⁷⁹ On March 24, 2012 a Spanish ensemble in the city of Santander performed a one-hour concert version of the music, *La Cantata de la Tierra sin Males*,¹⁸⁰ and on September 9th of that same year, the Mass was sung as the closing Eucharist for the annual congress of the Theological Association of John XXIII.¹⁸¹ According to the newsletter of the *Tierra sin Males* organization,¹⁸² the music has been performed several times in Spain in concert settings, but the 2012 performance in Madrid was the first time it was sung as part of a Eucharistic celebration.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Creutzberg, “Martin Coplas.”

¹⁷⁸ Cónrado Berning, “Missa da Terra Sem Males,” YouTube video, 35:02, Verbo Filmes, 1979, digitized and posted by Armazém Memória, October 5, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBNqtK-VF5g>. Page but not video archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426044438/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBNqtK-VF5g>

¹⁷⁹ Leonhard Creutzberg, “Aleluia da Missa da Terra sem Males,” *Portal Luteranos*, last modified June 29, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519224538/http://www.luteranos.com.br/conteudo/aleluia-da-missa-da-terra-sem-males-1>.

¹⁸⁰ “Cantata de la Misa Tierra sin Males,” YouTube video, 1:01:10, from a performance televised by Popular TV Cantabria, *Voces*, March 2012, posted by “caminandoiglesia,” Aug. 13, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ6Sai3BErs>. Page but not video archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426044623/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ6Sai3BErs>.

¹⁸¹ “La Cantata de la Tierra sin Males en Santander,” *Boletín de Tierra Sin Males*, no. 17 (Aug. 2012): 1, 4, http://www.tierrasinmales.org/Tierra_sin_males/BOLETINES_files/BOLETIN%20INFORMATIVO%2017%202029-08-2012.pdf.

¹⁸² *Tierra sin Males* is a Spanish organization founded in 2000 that promotes social awareness and solidarity with those who are marginalized. Two of its founders visited Brazil, met with Pedro Casaldáliga, and were inspired to work for social justice at home and abroad. For more information, see the organization’s website “Origen,” *Tierra sin Males*, accessed Oct. 10, 2014, http://www.tierrasinmales.org/Tierra_sin_males/Nosotros.html.

¹⁸³ “La Cantata de la Tierra sin Males en Santander,” 4.

Casaldáliga and Tierra both wrote extensive introductions to the *Missa* that are available with publications of the lyrics.¹⁸⁴ Casaldáliga entitles his remarks “Remembrance and Commitment” and begins by explaining that Christians are quick to recognize and honor Christian martyrs who die for their faith but calmly ignore the many martyrs whose deaths are caused by Christians.¹⁸⁵ The *Missa* is a public acknowledgement of the ways in which the Catholic Church has wronged the indigenous peoples of Brazil and all of Latin America over the centuries, an expression of remorse for these actions, and a pledge to walk in solidarity with indigenous communities in the future.

Recognizing that the *Missa* is likely to offend some of his compatriots, Casaldáliga insists that every authentic Mass is necessarily offensive to those who would maintain unjust structures that promote personal, ethnocentric, or economic greed.¹⁸⁶ He claims that early Christians had a better understanding that participating in the Lord’s Supper is a dangerous and subversive action. Modern Christians, by contrast, have become passive and fail to recognize the commitment required to work for justice and to bring about the Kingdom of God.¹⁸⁷ He writes, “I see myself as the heir of the missionaries of yesterday—of their sins and their merits. The ‘we’ of the ‘Penitential Memory’ of the Mass is a ‘we’ that is ecclesiastic and collective. What Christian can deny that we ought to attempt to right the wrongs committed, sometimes with the best of intentions, by the Church of Jesus yesterday and today?”¹⁸⁸

For Casaldáliga is it important to acknowledge the Church’s ongoing failures with respect to indigenous peoples. Although it might have been easier to focus on the era of conquest as the

¹⁸⁴ See, for example, Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁸⁵ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁸⁶ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁸⁷ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁸⁸ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

primary sin requiring atonement, Casaldáliga broadens the scope to include the Church's contemporary failings, which include an unwillingness to encourage the development of genuinely indigenous forms of Catholicism and the lack of prophetic critique of unjust legislative and judicial actions by the government. In addition Casaldáliga likens the exploitative actions of modern multi-national corporations to the abuses of the conquistadors, whose greed displaced indigenous peoples from their lands, forced them into hard labor, and extracted the natural wealth of the earth for the benefit of the empire.¹⁸⁹

Casaldáliga is clear to specify that the *Missa* is neither an oratorio nor a performance piece; it is a Catholic Mass that respects the liturgical outline. Through its texts and music style, the authors attempt to inculcate the Gospel in the worldview of the Guarani people, but the celebration is intended to be in harmony with the canonical Mass. He writes, "Throughout the Mass the death of Christ and his Resurrection, his personal Easter already completed, is contrasted with the Amerindian Easter, full of death but 'yet without Resurrection.' "¹⁹⁰

In his introduction to the published lyrics, Pedro Tierra emphasizes that the *Missa* is a response to the unspeakable violence that has been perpetrated on the indigenous peoples for centuries. He explains that among the continents that European colonizers enslaved—Africa, Asia, and America—America is the only one that will never be returned to its original peoples.¹⁹¹ He notes that the title *Missa da terra sem males* originated with the Guarani people, who envisioned a land without evil. For Tierra the fact that the Guarani dreamt of a *land* without

¹⁸⁹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

¹⁹⁰ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

¹⁹¹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

evil instead of a *heaven* without evil is an ideal link to this liberation-centered Mass that seeks to mobilize people to work for a possible utopia.¹⁹²

Tracing the origins of the Guarani story from the sixteenth century, Brazilian liturgist Simei Monteiro describes the Guarani tradition as a prophetic religion. For the Guarani, a belief in Maíra, a land without evil, initiates a quest that is both spiritual and geographic, leading the people over mountains and rivers seeking a land where there is no death, where crops grow unintended and people are free to spend their days feasting and dancing.¹⁹³ The Guarani believe that a prophet, or *caraí*, knows the *ayvu porã*, the beautiful, sacred words that represent the “original song,” a common language of human beings and gods that was conceived before the Earth came into existence.¹⁹⁴ They understand human beings as gods who have lost this original song and consequently need the help of the prophet to recognize again the divine dimension of human life. As the beautiful words are sung, the people remember their own divinity and continue the search for the land without evil.¹⁹⁵

For Tierra the *Missa*'s use of the Portuguese language, the language of Brazil, is profoundly significant because he sees Brazil playing a two-sided role as oppressed and oppressor. Despite its size and wealth of resources, it suffered historically under the Portuguese empire and suffers still as a disadvantaged player in the global economy. Yet, as a nation, Brazil has legislated and adjudicated against the majority of its own people, allowing the rich minority and transnational corporations to control land and resources. Tierra sees the indigenous peoples

¹⁹² Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁹³ Simei Monteiro, “Telling the Story of the Land without Evil: ‘Terra sem Males’ in Portuguese, or ‘Maíra’ in Guarani,” *Ecumenical Review* 60, no. 4 (October 2008): 370-73.

¹⁹⁴ Monteiro, “Telling the Story,” 371.

¹⁹⁵ Monteiro, “Telling the Story,” 371.

and the poor majority of the Brazilian people as victims of the same type of exploitation and as allies in resistance to it.¹⁹⁶

Tierra explains that it was necessary for this project to take shape as a Mass, rather than a poem or other secular form, because the history of the indigenous peoples of the Americas cannot be separated from the presence of the Church among them.¹⁹⁷ He writes, “The same Church that blessed the swords of the conquistadors and made a sacrament of the massacre and extermination of entire peoples, in this Mass covers itself in ashes and makes its own profound penance.”¹⁹⁸ While repentance alone does not begin to make reparation for what has been done, Tierra hopes that the *Missa* will lead people to acknowledge the profound ties that still exist between the Church and oppressed peoples and inspire in them a commitment to walk alongside those who seek liberation.¹⁹⁹

The *Missa da terra sem males* follows the structure of the canonical Catholic Mass with a heavy emphasis on the penitential rite. The musical sections of the *Missa* include an Opening Song, Penitential Memory, Alleluia, Offertory, Rite of Peace, Communion, and Final Commitment. Unlike classical Mass settings, not all parts of the Ordinary of the Mass are set to music: only the Kyrie/Penitential Memory and the modified Agnus Dei/Rite of Peace are included. Musically, the *Missa* draws from indigenous musical styles, and the featured indigenous instruments, such as the quena, tarkat-anat, bombo legüero, charango, zikuri, cultrum, and pinkuko.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁹⁷ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁹⁸ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

¹⁹⁹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰⁰ Monteiro, “Telling the Story,” 371.

The Penitential Memory is the heart of the *Missa*; its lyrics comprise almost half of the sung texts of the Mass. Casaldáliga describes it as a dialogue between the indigenous peoples of America, represented by solo voices, and the collective consciousness of the colonizing and missionizing civilization, represented by the chorus.²⁰¹ The opening declaration sung by the chorus establishes the tone for the whole piece: “Heirs of an empire of massacre, sons of secular domination, we want to make amends for our sins, we come to celebrate a new option: Resurrection.”²⁰² The chorus describes the Christian paradigm of movement from passion to resurrection and explains that the indigenous peoples have suffered but are still awaiting the joy of resurrection.²⁰³ Individual voices reply as the peoples of America, peoples of the earth, and peoples of the land without evil. Voices claim geographic areas (the Andes, the jungles, the grasslands, the sea), historic places of prominence for their communities (Tenochtitlan, Machu Pichu), and the names of people groups (Apache, Aztec, Aymara) as their own. The final solo voice establishes the use of Guarani imagery in the *Missa*: “I, Guarani. It is with the song of the Guarani that the rest of the continent, all of the peoples of my People, sing now their lament.”²⁰⁴

A solo voice issues a challenge to the chorus, “Brothers who came from afar, if you would like to be brothers, listen to my song!” and the chorus accepts, “We would like to hear with open hearts... we would like to repair the history of this land.”²⁰⁵ The following sections are a series of exchanges in which a voice for the indigenous peoples describes an aspect of their community’s life before the conquest and the chorus responds by admitting to the destruction of this lifestyle by the conquerors. The indigenous voices describe cultures that existed for

²⁰¹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰² Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰³ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰⁴ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰⁵ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

millennia in harmony with nature and had freedom of movement, access to land for hunting and planting crops, clean water and clean air, abundant food, good physical health, particular styles of dress, cultural expressions, and systems of cosmology. In response to each claim, the chorus details how each of these aspects of the indigenous lifestyles was disrupted. The chorus sings: “We destroyed them, full of our own superiority, denying the identity of the other Peoples, all members of the Human Family.”

As an indigenous voice describes gold, silver, diamonds, and the wood of the forests as sacred ornaments of the body of Mother Earth, the chorus admits to coming in greed to exploit and profit from the earth. In response to the indigenous claim that they had no need for clothing, the chorus responds, “And we dressed you in clothing of malice. We violated your daughters. We gave you our hypocrisy as morality.”

The indigenous voices acknowledge that their societies were not perfect but insist that they were better than that imposed by the colonizers: “I had my sins and I was involved in my own wars, but I did not know the law made lies and profit made God.” The chorus responds: “And we, unfaithful to the Gospel, missionized you... unfaithful to the Gospel of the Incarnate Word, we gave you a foreign culture as the message.”

As the piece progresses the dialogue moves from the historical era of the conquest to more recent complaints. The chorus admits that “we have reduced you to displays and reserves, to zoological parks, to dusty archives.” In an extended contrast, the indigenous voice states, “I was intoxicated with happiness. The village was a circle of friendship. My leaders worked as servants of the people, with the wisdom and respect of those who recognize themselves equal to the others,” and the chorus responds, “And we intoxicated you with sugar cane brandy and disdain. We made you the object of impudent tourism... we have thrown your language into a

grave of silence and your survivors to the side of the road, to the margins of the living, as hands of cheap labor on farms and in mines, in brothels and factories, beggars in the suburbs of the cities without soul...”²⁰⁶

In the final exchange of the Penitential Memory, the musical style changes and increases in intensity as a solo voice declaims: “I was all of America, I am still America, I am the new America.” The chorus responds with a commitment that recognizes the intimate ties between the indigenous communities and the dominant population and pledges solidarity: “And we are now, still and forever, the inheritors of your blood, the sons of your dead, and allies of your cause, reviving the memory in the alliance of this Easter.”²⁰⁷

The next four pieces of music in the *Missa* are much shorter and generally more in keeping with standard Mass texts. The Alleluia joyfully praises God for the Gospel, which is described as “the Word of all cultures,” the presence of God among people, and the destiny of history. The lyrics of the Offertory present to God the history of the suffering of the indigenous peoples in addition to the bread and wine. The ashes of raided villages, water polluted by mining, and the open veins of America²⁰⁸ are symbolically lifted to God along with the enduring Guarani hope of the land without evil. The Rite of Peace features the word for peace in three languages: Hebrew, Guarani, and Portuguese. *Shalom* is the ancient peace, *sauidi*, the lost peace, and the peace of Christ, *paz*, in Portuguese, is offered as the new peace. The Communion song suggests that joining together in communion is the first step toward working together for liberation.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁶ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰⁷ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

²⁰⁸ This phrase is presumably a reference to Eduardo Galeano’s historical analysis of the economic exploitation of Latin America, which was published in 1971. Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1997).

²⁰⁹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa da terra sem males.”

Although the intent of these four central pieces is clearly in keeping with the *Missa* as a whole, certain elements within them suggest that uprooting centuries of domination is not as easily accomplished as the authors might have hoped and that traditional religious language can both hold and hide a multitude of sins. The Alleluia, for example, suggests that “all of the peoples of the earth” praise God and that the Gospel is the “destiny of all of history.” While these are both typical expressions of Christian thought, they express a totalizing worldview that fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of other religious traditions or, more simply, any person’s right not to be a Christian. Likewise, the Rite of Peace suggests that the peace of Christ supersedes and replaces both *shalom* and *sauidi*. Clearly, it is not the authors’ intention to suggest that there are no longer people who would choose to express their hopes for peace in Hebrew or Guarani. Yet, in drawing from standard Christian tropes, they inadvertently erase from consideration those who stand outside the Christian tradition.

The Final Commitment is a litany in which the chorus responds “Memory, remorse, commitment” to a series of acclamations by the soloists. The soloists again recount the horrors of the past but this time with the suggestion that by celebrating the Eucharist together, the chains of the past can be broken. The litany honors the memory of individuals who were “patriarchs, prophets, and martyrs of the indigenous cause,” naming indigenous leaders including Montezuma, Atau Walpa, Tupac Amaru, and Sepé Tiaraju, prominent Christian figures including Rose of Lima, Bartolomé de las Casas, and Roque, Afonso, and João (the seventeenth-century martyrs whom the Brazilian bishops honored in 1978), as well as modern figures including João Bosco, a Jesuit priest and associate of Casaldáliga who was murdered in 1976.²¹⁰ The chorus

²¹⁰ On October 12, 1976, João Bosco Penido Burnier and Pedro Casaldáliga went to the local jail to investigate rumors that two women were being tortured there. When Bosco threatened to report the officers to the authorities, he was shot and killed. See Leonhard Creutzberg, “Pedro Casaldáliga,” *Portal*

concludes with a promise of shared responsibility for bringing about God's kingdom: "United in the memory of the resurrection of the Lord, we turn toward history with a significant responsibility... Amerindian America is still in the Passion: one day your death will have resurrection... we want to bring about that land without evil."²¹¹

Conclusion

The *Missa da terra sem males* is remarkable on the part of the Catholic Church as an acknowledgement of guilt, an expression of remorse, and a commitment to walk in solidarity with the indigenous peoples of Brazil and of all of Latin America in the future. The fact that Casaldáliga, a bishop acting within his official position in the hierarchy, was one of the co-authors and the fact that nearly forty bishops attended the premiere of the *Missa* lent institutional credibility to this work. As leaders and spokespeople for the Church, these bishops claim responsibility for the Church's actions over the past five centuries and name the abuses perpetrated by the Church before promising to work toward a healthier, more respectful relationship with indigenous peoples in the future.

On the other hand, given the Church's long history of disrespect for local cultures, demonization of indigenous spiritual traditions, and abuse of indigenous peoples, it is reasonable to wonder whether any Church-based effort could be experienced as empowering for indigenous peoples. The *Missa* is an apology and a promise to do better in the future, but it retains traditional Christian language that does not recognize its own totalizing tendencies. It is respectful in its incorporation of indigenous elements into a Mass, but it is not an inculturated Mass that is born from an indigenous community. Among the authors, only Coplas has indigenous heritage, and

Luteranos, last modified June 29, 2012,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20160426042858/http://www.luteranos.com.br/conteudo/pedro-casaldaliga-1928>.

²¹¹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa da terra sem males."

based on the footage available, there were few, if any, indigenous participants involved in the premiere. Thus this is an apology coming from a Church that is still largely white in its power structure and its mindset.

Irarrázaval and Casaldáliga would undoubtedly say that the Church can be a resource of empowerment for indigenous peoples, not in itself as an institution but based on the strength of gospel message. They find in the example of Jesus a model for honoring those who are despised by society and a source of empowerment for marginalized communities. Fidelity to the Christian message, for Irarrázaval and Casaldáliga, can walk hand in hand with traditional cultural practices of indigenous communities.

As an act of penance, the *Missa da terra sem males* creates a space for an inculturated expression of faith to emerge from indigenous communities. Although it is not necessarily a first step needed before indigenous communities can act, it is a necessary step if the Christianities that emerge from local communities in Latin America are to be welcomed and recognized as full partners in dialogue with the Christianities that have emerged from Europe and other regions of the world.

Chapter 3

From the Quilombo to the Kingdom of God: “Estamos chegando/We are arriving”²¹²

According to the 2010 national census, slightly over half (50.7 percent) of Brazil’s population of 190 million is Black or of mixed race.²¹³ The census reveals that the Black population has the highest rate of illiteracy (roughly 25 percent) in the over-15 age group.²¹⁴ The statistics on income distribution paint an even bleaker picture with respect to racial disparities:

Research has shown that there is still marked inequality in terms of income throughout the country, with the richest strata of society earning 42 times more than the poorest. Half of the Brazilian population lives on less than 375 reais per month [approximately USD \$200]... Of the 16.2 million people living in extreme poverty (approximately 8.5% of the population), which is classified as having an income of 70 reais [approximately USD \$38] per month or less, 70.8% are black.²¹⁵

The modern situation of inequity in Brazil has its roots in the slave trade that brought African slaves to the Portuguese colony of Brazil starting in the mid-sixteenth century. Although the slave trade ended in 1850 and slavery was abolished in 1888, White society saw the emancipation of slaves as a gift or concession made to the Blacks and expected gratitude and loyalty in return. The governing powers that wrote the abolition of slavery into law made no attempt to alter the social, economic, educational, cultural, and religious systems that surrounded and upheld the institution of slavery. As Afro-Brazilians gained their legal freedom, scientific theories masquerading under the banner of objectivity and neutrality proclaimed the inferiority of

²¹² Pedro Casaldáliga and Pedro Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos” (liturgy), *Servicios Koinonia*, accessed Jan. 12, 2015,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20160426042400/http://www.servicioskoinonia.org/Casaldaliga/poesia/quilombos.htm>.

²¹³ Paula Góes, “Brazil: Census ‘Reveals’ Majority of Population is Black or Mixed Race,” *Global Voices*, trans. Maisie Fitzpatrick, November 29, 2011,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20160519225051/https://globalvoices.org/2011/11/29/brazil-census-black-mixed-population/>.

²¹⁴ Góes, “Brazil: Census.”

²¹⁵ Góes, “Brazil: Census.”

the Black race.²¹⁶ The Whites continued to see the former slaves as things rather than people, beings degenerate in character, barbaric in practices, and lacking ancestors, given or family names, and cultural history.²¹⁷

As the statistics from the 2010 census reveal, the Afro-Brazilian population continues to struggle with the legacy of slavery and face entrenched discrimination, lack of educational opportunities, lack of financial capital for advancement, and cultural biases against dark skin. The pernicious effects of coloniality are a daily reality for the Afro-Brazilian community.

In the 1970s Afro-Brazilian activists began a new phase of their efforts to promote Black consciousness by opening centers of Afro-Brazilian studies at universities and founding civic centers for Black culture and aesthetics. Black theologians participated in this movement by addressing the Christian theological tradition critically, identifying its explicitly racist elements, uncovering its disguised racist tendencies, and calling for a renewed commitment to the liberating message of the gospel.

Following his Mass for the indigenous peoples, *Missa da terra sem males* (1979), Pedro Casaldáliga turned his attention to Afro-Brazilians as a significant group within the Brazilian population who had been directly harmed by the Church's actions over the centuries. Complementing its predecessor, Casaldáliga's new project, *Missa dos Quilombos*, expresses the Church's repentance for its direct and complicit roles in the slave trade and its ongoing failure to help bring about justice for the Afro-Brazilian population. It seeks forgiveness and promises to walk in solidarity with Afro-Brazilians in the future.

²¹⁶ Selma Suely Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos: um canto de Axé,” *Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná*, accessed April 3, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426044116/http://www.dacex.ct.utfpr.edu.br/selma2.htm>.

²¹⁷ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

The quilombos mentioned in Casaldáliga's title were communities of fugitive slaves, the most famous of which was the Quilombo of Palmares in Northeastern Brazil. Afro-Brazilian activists have claimed Palmares as an important symbol of resistance for the Black community, and the *Missa* draws on this rich history. This chapter reviews the history of the quilombos and explains their place in the current Afro-Brazilian imagination; explores the theological contributions of Black Christians who explain how mainstream theology has promoted racist sentiments and behaviors; and analyzes Casaldáliga's *Missa dos Quilombos* for its contribution to mending the Church's relationship with the Afro-Brazilian population while identifying its limitations.

The History of Quilombos

Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, slaves in Brazil who escaped their owners fled to rural areas and formed quilombos, independent communities that existed outside the control of the colonial society.²¹⁸ These communities were often located near the colonial towns, plantations, and mining fields from which the slaves had escaped, and they were frequent targets for the colonial military and *capitães-do-mato* (slave patrollers).²¹⁹ It is difficult to confirm details about the number of quilombos and the daily operations of these communities that existed throughout the centuries of slavery in Brazil. In particular the historical record is complicated by the various political forces that have had a hand in telling the history and reshaping it to their own ends. For the colonial masters the quilombos were hives of lawlessness that needed to be eradicated. For modern Afro-Brazilian activists the quilombos were centers that preserved

²¹⁸ Gilberto R. N. Leal, "Fárigá/Ìfaradà: Black Resistance and Achievement in Brazil," in *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Sheila S. Walker (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 293.

²¹⁹ João José Reis, "Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil," in *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas*, ed. Sheila S. Walker (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001), 304.

African traditions, operated democratically, featured communal ownership of land and resources, and remain an exemplar of the glorious legacy of Afro-Brazilian resistance.²²⁰

Two examples may serve to demonstrate these contrasting perspectives. Historian Stuart Schwartz quotes eighteenth-century slave catcher Severino Pereira's description of the residents of the quilombos as "enemies of the State" who occupied their time "committing robbery, murder, sacking houses, stealing cattle, devastating farms, holding up travelers on the roads, inducing other slaves [to escape] and taking them by force for their reproachable purposes."²²¹ By contrast Afro-Brazilian activist Gilberto Leal writes:

Three hundred years ago, in 1695, on a mountain in the state of Alagoas, one of the most glorious pages of Brazilian history ended with the assassination of the first great leader and true Brazilian hero risen from the oppressed masses, Zumbi of Palmares. Among the episodes of our history, it is for us Afro-Brazilian activists an uncontested fact that the Quilombo of Palmares held and still holds an unparalleled relevance for the entire Brazilian community as a model for the fight for national independence from Portuguese colonialism.²²²

Conflict between the quilombos and the Brazilian colonial state was inevitable. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the African and Afro-Brazilian slaves were the producers of wealth for the white minority who reaped the benefits of this labor.²²³ In the early sixteenth century, slaves from Africa introduced the practice of mining in Brazil based on the knowledge and skills they had brought from their homelands.²²⁴ Communities of escaped slaves were not tolerated in a society that existed off slave labor, and autonomous communities were a threat to

²²⁰ Leal, "Fárigá/Ìfaradà," 291, 294.

²²¹ Stuart B. Schwartz, "Cantos and Quilombos: A Hausa Rebellion in Bahia, 1814," in *Slaves, Subjects, and Subversives: Blacks in Colonial Latin America*, eds. Jane G. Landers and Barry M. Robinson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 251.

²²² Leal, "Fárigá/Ìfaradà," 293.

²²³ Leal, "Fárigá/Ìfaradà," 292.

²²⁴ Leal, "Fárigá/Ìfaradà," 292.

the sovereignty of the Portuguese crown.²²⁵ For this reason many of the quilombos operated only for a limited time; within a few weeks or months, the colonial army or the slave catchers would find and dismantle the communities and return the inhabitants to their former masters.²²⁶ These raids, however, frequently led to the formation of new quilombos as some of the fugitives would avoid capture and establish new settlements.²²⁷

The Quilombo of Palmares in what is now the state of Alagoas in northeastern Brazil was the exception to this trend. Palmares flourished for almost a century from 1595 to 1695 and survived nearly forty expeditions by the military to dismantle the community.²²⁸ During its long existence Palmares was destroyed and rebuilt many times, making it difficult to generalize about the size and character of the community.²²⁹ Leal describes Palmares as a confederacy of villages that covered 27,000 square kilometers and was home to 20,000-30,000 inhabitants.²³⁰ Other historians give more conservative estimates of the size of Palmares and of the number of quilombos in general. Historian João José Reis considers it impossible to assign a precise figure to the population of Palmares but estimates that it may have been a few thousand. He explains that colonial authorities are responsible for the much higher estimates of twenty to thirty thousand, inflated estimates they may have used to justify themselves to the Portuguese Crown in light of their repeated failures to destroy Palmares.²³¹ The total number of quilombos across

²²⁵ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 293.

²²⁶ Schwartz, “*Cantos and Quilombos*,” 25.

²²⁷ Schwartz, “*Cantos and Quilombos*,” 264.

²²⁸ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 293-4.

²²⁹ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 303.

²³⁰ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 294.

²³¹ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 301-2.

Brazil in the official record may also be misleading because the colonial government defined a quilombo as a gathering of as few as five fugitives settled in an unpopulated area.²³²

The term quilombo likely derived from the Imbangala people of Central Africa for whom a *kilombo* was a military society. As Palmares grew in size and reputation, the term quilombo increased in popularity as a general name for fugitive slave communities.²³³ The quilombos brought together members of different African ethnic groups, forging alliances among individuals of different geographic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds. Reis describes this situation as the *recreation* of African ethnicity in a new setting, rather than the transference of previously existing identities to Brazil.²³⁴

Leal describes Palmares as a democratic state in which decisions were made by a council composed of leaders of the various constituencies of the community.²³⁵ Leal claims that each village had a democratically elected local council and that a central supreme council coordinated the efforts of the villages. When the community faced important decisions, all of the adult inhabitants (both women and men) gathered for an assembly to discuss the issue and reach a consensus.²³⁶ The rulers of Palmares seem to have used the title of king, but Leal explains this as “a reflection of their African roots and their colonial context,” rather than evidence of a dictatorial character in the quilombos.²³⁷

²³² Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 301.

²³³ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 302.

²³⁴ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 309.

²³⁵ Leal, “*Fárigá/Ìfaradà*,” 294.

²³⁶ Leal, “*Fárigá/Ìfaradà*,” 294.

²³⁷ Leal, “*Fárigá/Ìfaradà*,” 293.

Significantly for activist Leal, Palmares was a multi-ethnic state open to anyone who was oppressed by the colonial system.²³⁸ In addition to enslaved and freed Africans and Afro-Brazilians, the community welcomed landless indigenous people, and mestizos and whites who lacked money, land, and influence within colonial society with the motto: “*Quem vier para amor à liberdade, fica*” (Whoever comes for the love of liberty, stays).²³⁹

Reis is critical of several aspects of the Afro-Brazilian activists’ portrayal of Palmares. Scholars like Leal draw from a tradition of Marxist historiography that developed beginning in the 1970s. Reis is cautious about defining the character of quilombos too specifically, explaining that the people of Palmares “effectively organized production and developed new kinship and power structures, but [that] not much is known about the internal life of the quilombos.”²⁴⁰ While he praises the historical recovery of a suppressed aspect of the Afro-Brazilian legacy, he identifies new myths, such as the idealized democratic quilombo, that serve contemporary political aims.²⁴¹ In particular, Reis highlights the film, *Quilombo*, made in 1984 by Carlos Diegues as portraying Palmares as an eternal carnival, and he explains that this depiction of Palmares “is only made possible through a very partial, not to say distorted, reading of the available sources.”²⁴² Earlier Brazilian histories had honored Domingos Jorge Velho, the military leader who led the final assault against Palmares, without acknowledging the brutality of his victory, but the Marxist histories of the 1970 created a romanticized, utopian vision of Palmares that is only sporadically faithful to the historical record.

²³⁸ Leal, “Fárigá/Ífaradà,” 294.

²³⁹ Leal, “Fárigá/Ífaradà,” 293.

²⁴⁰ Reis, “Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil,” 303.

²⁴¹ Reis, “Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil,” 303.

²⁴² Reis, “Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil,” 303.

The community of Palmares based its economy on the production of corn, beans, sweet potatoes, bananas, and sugarcane, and they traded their surplus produce in local markets for arms, ammunition, and food.²⁴³ Conducting raids on nearby villages and plantations allowed the community to acquire supplies and recruit new members. In particular women, who comprised a small portion of the colonial population, were often captured in these raids.²⁴⁴ Reis suggests that individuals captured in raids were sometime held in temporary slavery, which presents a serious problem to those who emphasize the egalitarian character of Palmares.²⁴⁵

To temper the claim that the fugitives founded quilombos in an attempt to drop out of Brazilian society and recreate an African model, Reis points out that the quilombos maintained strong contacts with the surrounding societies despite their rural or isolated settings. Trade with farmers and merchants was essential to the communities' survival. Likewise residents of the quilombos often maintained personal relationships with free people and people still in bondage on the plantations and in the towns.²⁴⁶

Over the community's long history, the colonial government alternated between sending military attacks to disband Palmares and peace proposals to control it. In 1678 the leader of Palmares, Ganga Zumba, accepted a controversial treaty that gave Palmares a modicum of autonomy. The colonial authorities offered land and granted freedom to those born in the settlement in return for the community's loyalty to the Portuguese Crown and promise to return

²⁴³ Teixeira, "Missa dos Quilombos."

²⁴⁴ Reis, "Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil," 302. In addition to the raids themselves, colonial authorities were particularly outraged by the practice of polyandry within the quilombos. Reis speculates that an official document in 1677 may exaggerate the details of the practice in order to demonstrate the "barbarous" behavior in the quilombos to a Christian audience, but the imbalance of women and men in the population may have necessitated this practice. See Reis, 304.

²⁴⁵ Reis, "Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil," 303.

²⁴⁶ Reis, "Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil," 304.

fugitives to slavery.²⁴⁷ Palmares was divided into two camps: those who supported Ganga Zumba and those who rallied behind his nephew, Zumbi, who rejected the treaty.

Reis explains that the name Zumbi has been at the center of an ongoing question in Palmares historiography since the nineteenth century. Historians are uncertain whether Zumbi was the proper name of the individual who was the final leader of Palmares or whether it was a political title that was used repeatedly over the decades.²⁴⁸ In either case the final Zumbi, whose legacy is honored by Afro-Brazilian activists, was the nephew of the previous king, Ganga Zumba (a name that also may have been a royal or religious title rather than a proper name). The relationship between these two leaders suggests matrilineal descent, which is common in the Central African region from which many of the early members of Palmares came.²⁴⁹

During the 1680s and 1690s the government increased its military expeditions against Palmares. In February 1694 Domingos Jorge Velho led a military attack on the settlement that ended in a massacre that killed the majority of the residents. Zumbi, who had assumed leadership of the community after the death of Ganga Zumba, escaped during the fighting but was captured and killed on November 20, 1695.²⁵⁰ Although the final battle of Palmares resulted in the massacre of most members of the community, Velho has been recognized in official Brazilian history as a hero, and Zumbi has been largely unrecognized in historical accounts until the past fifty years.²⁵¹

In the twentieth century Afro-Brazilian activists began to honor Palmares as the root of Black consciousness and resistance, and Leal traces the community's legacy through

²⁴⁷ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 303.

²⁴⁸ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 302.

²⁴⁹ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 302.

²⁵⁰ Reis, “*Quilombos and Rebellions in Brazil*,” 303.

²⁵¹ Leal, “*Fárigá/Ìfaradà*,” 294.

developments in Black consciousness of the past century. Beginning in 1915 the Black press began to emerge in Brazil, and in 1931, activists founded the first all-Black political party, the *Frente Negra Brasileira* (Black Brazilian Front).²⁵² In the 1940s Afro-Brazilian activists turned their attention to founding cultural organizations, such as the *Teatro Experimental do Negro* (Black Experimental Theater) and *Teatro do Povo* (Theater of the People), and organizing congresses to discuss Black realities in Brazil.²⁵³

From the 1950s until the military takeover in 1964, Black movement activists engaged in political battles to end discrimination based on skin color and to promote access to education, professional training, and improved living conditions.²⁵⁴ During the early years of the dictatorship (1964-1974), political activism was severely curtailed, and the Black movement gained no traction until the 1974 Geisel regime lifted some of the restrictions on social activism. In the early 1970s Black activists again focused on culture and the arts with a movement that was influenced by the Black pride movement in the United States and prominently featured the “Black is Beautiful” slogan.²⁵⁵ In particular Black youth in Rio de Janeiro formed a movement known as Black Rio to respond to the mechanisms of exclusion they experienced within Brazil’s social system and social problems such as unemployment, ghettoization, and the lack of leisure activities for Afro-Brazilians.²⁵⁶

As the cultural and aesthetic movement gained momentum in the mid-1970s, universities began founding centers of Afro-Brazilian Studies and research institutions, such as the *Instituto de Pesquisas das Culturas Negras* (Institute for Research on Black Cultures), *Gremio Recreativo*

²⁵² Leal, “Fárígá/Ìfaradà,” 296.

²⁵³ Leal, “Fárígá/Ìfaradà,” 296.

²⁵⁴ Leal, “Fárígá/Ìfaradà,” 297.

²⁵⁵ Leal, “Fárígá/Ìfaradà,” 297.

²⁵⁶ Leal, “Fárígá/Ìfaradà,” 297.

de Arte Negra e Escola de Samba Quilombo (Recreational Association for Black Arts and Quilombo Samba School), and *Núcleo Cultural Afro-Brasileiro* (Afro-Brazilian Cultural Center).²⁵⁷ In 1978 an incident of police torture that led to the death of a Black man prompted the founding of the *Movimento Negro Unificado Contra a Discriminação Racial* (the United Black Movement Against Racial Discrimination), an organization that successfully lobbied for the establishment of the Día Nacional da Consciência Negra (the National Day of Black Consciousness) in November of that year.²⁵⁸ This holiday is now celebrated annually on November 20th to commemorate the death of Zumbi of Palmares.²⁵⁹

It is in this context that Casaldáliga and his collaborators wrote the *Missa dos Quilombos* in 1981. In 1980 the Brazilian government had established the Zumbi Memorial, a national historical park on the site of the Quilombo of Palmares in the state of Alagoas.²⁶⁰ Casaldáliga attended the opening ceremony representing the progressive sector of the Catholic Church. He stated that the Church's presence at the ceremony was a penitential act for its failings over the centuries and, he hoped, the sign of a new consciousness arising in the Church.²⁶¹

In 1994 Afro-Brazilian organizations lobbied the government to grant property titles to communities descended from the quilombos. The Brazilian legislature amended the federal constitution with Article 68, the Act of Transitory Constitutional Dispositions, which granted

²⁵⁷ Leal, “Fárígá/Ífaradà,” 297.

²⁵⁸ Leal, “Fárígá/Ífaradà,” 297.

²⁵⁹ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

²⁶⁰ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

²⁶¹ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

property titles to the inhabitants of former quilombo communities.²⁶² While some of the communities have since received the property titles, others still have not.²⁶³

In 1995 Afro-Brazilian activists led the national commemoration of the three-hundredth anniversary of the death of Zumbi of Palmares, whom they recognized as “one of the greatest Black leaders of the Americas.”²⁶⁴ Activists sponsored the Zumbi of Palmares March against Racism and for Equality and Life, and promoted the selection of “Zumbi, 300 Years of Courage” as the theme of the Bahian carnival.²⁶⁵

Black Theology

The early history of the Church’s engagement with slavery in Brazil presents a mixed legacy. Although individual missionaries advocated for humane treatment of slaves, the institution of slavery as a whole was seldom challenged. In 1585 Pope Gregory XIII decreed that baptism should be part of the formalities of the slave trade, and the slave traders assigned each slave a new name through a process (and in a language) completely foreign and without meaning to the individual.²⁶⁶ The religious orders owned slaves, and a report as late as 1870 finds that the Benedictines owned 1,265 slaves, the Carmelites 1,050, the Franciscans 40, and the religious sisters 405.²⁶⁷ Those who advocated on behalf of the slaves struggled with the contradictions inherent in their Christian evangelical mission: namely, the theological tenets that consider all people to be children of God and the Church’s acquiescence to the institution of slavery. In their

²⁶² Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 299.

²⁶³ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 299.

²⁶⁴ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 291.

²⁶⁵ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 291.

²⁶⁶ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

²⁶⁷ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

religious writings these advocates were seldom able to undercut the political and economic views that afforded slavery its unchallenged place in society.

Three examples of the missionaries' writings from the early years of slavery in Brazil illustrate these contradictions. Portuguese Jesuit António Vieira (1608-1697) was an outspoken advocate for the indigenous peoples as well as the African slaves in Brazil. In a sermon from the mid-seventeenth century Vieira expresses a deep sympathy for slaves who are mistreated and warns that those who inflict this mistreatment put their own souls at risk. Vieira uses Christian theology to assert that slaves are formed in the image and likeness of God and that God hears the cries of the afflicted. At the same time, however, he uses Christian scriptures to justify the institution of slavery and preach patience and submission to the slaves.

Vieira begins by contrasting eloquently the life experiences of the masters and slaves:

The masters few, the slaves many; the masters decked out in courtly dress, the slaves ragged and naked; the masters feasting, the slaves dying of hunger; the masters swimming in gold and silver, the slaves weighted down with irons; the masters treating them like brutes, the slaves adoring and fearing them as gods; the masters standing erect, waving their whips, like statues of pride and tyranny, the slaves prostrate with their hands tied behind them like the vilest images of servitude, spectacles of extraordinary misery.²⁶⁸

These circumstances are unconscionable for Vieira because the slaves should be recognized as God's creations and souls redeemed by Christ.²⁶⁹ In light of this theological stance, the abuse of slaves who are Christians is a grave sin.

For slaves who suffer on earth, Vieira problematically imagines recompense in the afterlife. He explains, "I cannot accept the idea that God, who created these people as much in His own image as He did the rest of us, would have predestined them for two hells, one in this

²⁶⁸ António Vieira, "A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves," in *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 120.

²⁶⁹ Vieira, "A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves," 121.

life and another in the next.”²⁷⁰ He is willing, however, to interpret present suffering under temporal slavery as preparation for a future of eternal freedom. He describes slavery as “a sad and miserable condition” that requires one to “serve throughout life without hope of reward, and to work without hope of rest except in the grave!”²⁷¹

Vieira’s theological understanding of the soul allows a measure of autonomy to the enslaved person. He explains that slavery is only partial: “You are slaves in your exterior part, which is the body; however, in the other interior and nobler half, the soul... you are not a slave, but free.”²⁷² The soul, he claims, cannot be enslaved by any human power; only the individual, acting out of free will, has any control over the destiny of the soul.²⁷³ While this assertion of human dignity and self-determination could have been used as ideological motivation to resist the degradation of the condition of slavery, Vieira chooses instead conventional religious language of the time to urge slaves to accept their condition. Vieira draws from the Pauline letters to enjoin the slaves to obey their masters knowing that while they do not inherit the wealth they produce on earth, they have become heirs of God. Likewise he cites 1 Peter to invite the slaves to endure their suffering patiently in order to follow the example of Christ.²⁷⁴

Vieira continues with a warning to those who would mistreat slaves. Interestingly, this passage is addressed to the immediate overseers of the slaves and does not call into question the behavior of the slave owners. He decries the abuse and excesses to which the slaves are subjected and claims that these tyrannical abuses deserve “more the name of martyrdoms than of

²⁷⁰ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 121.

²⁷¹ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 122.

²⁷² Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 121.

²⁷³ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 121.

²⁷⁴ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 122.

punishments.”²⁷⁵ “What theology,” he asks, “could justify the inhumanity and brutality of the exorbitant punishments with which these same slaves are mistreated?”²⁷⁶ He draws from the story of the Exodus to insist that God will hear the cries of those who suffer and punish those who have caused the suffering. Vieira’s interpretation of the Exodus story highlights his conviction that slavery itself is not the problem; rather, the sin that will incur punishment is the injustice of causing excessive suffering. He explains, “God does not complain about the Pharaoh, but rather about his overseers... because the overseers are often those who cruelly oppress the slaves.”²⁷⁷ It is to the overseers and not the owners that Vieira addresses his warning: “Know full well that God hears these cries for help which you do not hear; and though they do not touch your heart, you should know that they make your own punishment certain.”²⁷⁸

The limit to Vieira’s compassion for the slaves’ suffering becomes obvious when faced with the issue of the quilombos. Siding with the slave owners, Vieira considered the fugitives criminals and forbade them to receive the sacraments because as residents of the quilombos they lived in mortal sin.²⁷⁹

In 1794 the governor of the province of Bahia deported an Italian Capuchin missionary, Friar Joseph of Bologna, for asking unsettling questions regarding the legitimacy of the institution of slavery as practiced in Brazil. Friar Joseph insisted on distinguishing between slaves captured in just and unjust wars, and by consequence, believed that those slaves who had been captured unjustly ought to be freed. In the governor’s letter to the Portuguese authorities, he accused Friar Joseph of requiring the slave owners who had come to him for confession to

²⁷⁵ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 122.

²⁷⁶ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 122.

²⁷⁷ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 123.

²⁷⁸ Vieira, “A Brotherhood of Black Creole Slaves,” 123.

²⁷⁹ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

ponder the “very difficult if not unresolvable question” of whether their slaves had been captured legitimately. Pursuing this line of inquiry, the governor claimed, would be “not only useless but obviously capable of eliminating every kind of commerce.”²⁸⁰ For the governor, that challenge to the economic status quo was enough to warrant Friar Joseph’s deportation.

In 1700 the Italian Jesuit Jorge Benci published the manual, “Economia cristã dos senhores no governo dos escravos” (A Christian Method for Masters to Manage their Slaves). The title alone indicates Benci’s belief in the legitimacy of the institution of slavery and the possibility that slaves could be managed in a Christian manner. In this manual he advocates for slaves’ right to marry using the theological argument that marriage is a remedy against lust and a means of avoiding sin. Because, he argues, slave owners cannot possibly control or eliminate their slaves’ sexual desires, marriage must be made accessible to slaves in order to prevent them from falling into sin. Furthermore once slaves are married the practice of separating spouses must be avoided because it disrupts the union made sacred by the sacrament of marriage. Benci also seeks to protect female slaves from the sexual advances of their masters:

Is it not a scandal, and the most hateful in the eyes of God, for the master to establish a friendship with his slave girl? And is it not much worse yet, and more abominable, to compel her by the use of force to consent to her master’s sin, and to punish her when she resists and seeks to avoid this offense against God? No Catholic will deny it. And should the master who does this expect to be saved?²⁸¹

While using Christian theology to argue in favor of more humane treatment of slaves, Benci accepts the institution of slavery as beyond question.

²⁸⁰ “Slavery and the Political Economy of Portuguese Brazil,” in *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 128-9.

²⁸¹ Jorge Benci, “Slaves and Christian Marriage,” in *Religion in Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Lee M. Penyak and Walter J. Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 126.

These early efforts by Europeans to advocate on behalf of slaves, although commendable in that they ran against the tide of what was accepted as common sense and appropriate behavior in their society, cannot properly be considered a stage in the development of a Latin American Black theology. The missionaries' efforts may mark the first time that Christian theology was used in an effort to alleviate some of the suffering of Afro-descendent people in Brazil, but the missionaries spoke from a position of privilege on behalf of the slaves. They largely accepted their roles as benefactors whose religious education would elevate the lives of the slaves, and they left entirely unchallenged the presumption that the slaves' conversion to Christianity (and, of necessity, the abandonment of their original religious traditions) would enhance the lives of the slaves. Despite their limitations, they expressed a Christian theology more strongly aligned with the cause of justice for African and Afro-Brazilian people, and their theological insights, such as the inherent dignity of the human being made in the image and likeness of God and the impossibility of enslaving the soul, provided resources for resistance. Nevertheless, many centuries passed before Afro-Brazilians began to articulate a formal theology based in their own experiences that would allow them to advocate for themselves. That communities theologized in their own practices cannot be denied, but these lived theological insights are more difficult to preserve, retrieve, and analyze than written accounts. The following section examines the work of three Latin American theologians of African descent—Maricel Mena-López, Marcos Rodrigues da Silva, and Silvia Regina de Lima Silva—who address the Christian theological tradition critically, identify its explicitly racist elements, uncover its disguised racist tendencies, and call for a renewed commitment to the liberating message of the gospel.

Maricel Mena-López, a Colombian biblical scholar, works to unmask the racism and sexism present in biblical texts. Moving one step beyond this task, she also reveals these same

forces at work in the history of biblical research.²⁸² One of her central concerns is that scholars of ancient Israelite religion have not recognized the influence of the African peoples living at the borders of the Semitic world. She claims that it is a “white, androcentric process of interpretation and editing” that has prevented available resources from being integrated into biblical studies.²⁸³ The long-term effects of this lack of historical research into African influences have even more damaging consequences: they lead to a lack of collective identity for African women and men that hinders their ability to “reconstruct a self-image that is worthy of respect and esteem.”²⁸⁴

It is an important corrective to biblical scholarship to recognize its tendency to “negate the participation and influence of the African nations in Israelite history.”²⁸⁵ Mena-López explains that Eurocentric logic robs people groups of their specific identities and treats them as homogenized cultures. Specifically, she believes that the identities of African groups whose particular characteristics are preserved in the biblical record have been fused together to detract from the legacy of African influence on the history of Israel.²⁸⁶ Even maps of the “land of the Bible” tend to ignore Africa despite biblical texts, such as the description of the Garden of Eden, that explicitly include Africa.²⁸⁷ Mena-López opposes the “argument from silence” that claims that if something has not been found, then it could not have existed in significant quantities

²⁸² Maricel Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman: Reflections on Race, Gender, and Religion in the Biblical World,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, eds. María Pilar Aquino and María José Rosado-Nunes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 145.

²⁸³ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 145, 148.

²⁸⁴ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 147.

²⁸⁵ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 150.

²⁸⁶ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 152.

²⁸⁷ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 150.

because she recognizes that “many ancient peoples were quite present in history but were made ‘absent’ by a selective type of historiography and philosophy.”²⁸⁸

Mena-López is also troubled by the tendency among biblical scholars to divide texts into those of historical or mythical origin based on racial considerations. She claims that the “African traditions are treated as myths without foundation, while the Semitic traditions are considered by academics to be *true* because they have a historical basis.”²⁸⁹ Simply dismissing mythical narratives is problematic for two reasons: first, it is unreasonable to assume that all narratives that are not accounted for by Western history are untrue; and second, narratives that are mythical may contribute symbolic and anthropological insights to enrich the field of biblical studies.²⁹⁰

Mena-López claims that the ancient world recognized that African peoples influenced the peoples of the Mediterranean. It was not until centuries later that racist historians and biblical scholars attempted to write out the African contribution to the classical world.²⁹¹ In particular, the romantics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not want to see ancient Greece, which for them was “the cradle of humanity,” as a mixture of European, African, and Semitic influences. Similarly Aryan ideologies minimized the importance of the Egyptian civilization and attempted to de-Africanize the Egyptians.²⁹²

For Mena-López valuing the African contribution does not mean denying the influence of other cultures. It is not a universalist posture that seeks to apply its elements to all other human experiences; rather, it seeks to value the worldview proper to each people.²⁹³ Expanding the field

²⁸⁸ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 161.

²⁸⁹ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 155.

²⁹⁰ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 155-6.

²⁹¹ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 160.

²⁹² Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 159-160.

²⁹³ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 160.

of biblical studies to serious consideration of African sources is also not a matter of inventing something new; it consists in paying appropriate attention to what is written in the biblical text.²⁹⁴ Conducting biblical scholarship without the racist presuppositions that make African influences invisible affirms the commonsense position that the history of Israel interfaces with African peoples, unveils a system of false historiography that operated for centuries to condemn people and cultures to oblivion, and restores a sense of collective identity for people of African heritage.²⁹⁵

Black theologian Marcos Rodrigues da Silva sees important connections between Black social movements and the articulation of Black theology and pastoral reflection. Black social movements have promoted awareness of a Black identity and developed a capacity for effective intervention in society.²⁹⁶ The Black community of faith participates in these social efforts to promote the material conditions necessary for a humane and fulfilling life and to end regimes that oppress and limit the practice of liberation. In rural areas these efforts can include new agricultural practices that respect nature while in urban areas they often center on issues of land ownership and tenancy and the struggles for the rights of the working class.²⁹⁷ Black activists struggle in common with indigenous and mestizo groups for respect of their cultural values, including maintaining their language and valuing the rites and traditions of their ancestors.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 161.

²⁹⁵ Mena-López, “Because of an Ethiopian Woman,” 153, 162.

²⁹⁶ Marcos Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” *Revista identidade!* 15, no. 2 (July-December 2010): 3, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://periodicos.est.edu.br/index.php/identidade/article/viewFile/94/146>.

²⁹⁷ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 3.

²⁹⁸ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 3.

In response to these social movements, Black theologians must engage the new commitments that arise in the life of the Black community.²⁹⁹ Rodrigues da Silva raises questions that are common to Black theology movements elsewhere, such as “Is God Black?” or “Is Jesus Black?” but he also focuses on questions particular to the Latin American region including whether or not Blacks and their religious heritage can be recognized within the liberation theology of Latin America and how one might think about Black faith and identity both inside and outside the Church.³⁰⁰

Because the Black community is the subject of this new theological reflection, new norms arise for the theological debate. As the theological locus shifts to the lived experience of a subject who is active, Black, and poor, theological activity is transformed by the inclusion of a perspective that had been excluded.³⁰¹ As the historical legacy of Christian theology needs to be reread and reevaluated, so do the expression of Latin American liberation theology, including the CELAM documents from Medellín, Puebla, Santo Domingo, and Aparecida. These need to be measured against the Christian praxis of the Black community.³⁰²

In response to critics who would suggest that articulating Black theology is divisive, Rodrigues da Silva insists that being partial is unavoidable. He cites liberation theologian Joseph Comblin who explains that all scholarship reflects the personality of the author and that presenting only part of the truth is inevitable. The theological community as a whole encompasses these partialities, and “in discussion, in debates and dialogues, errors and partialities are corrected.”³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 2.

³⁰⁰ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 2.

³⁰¹ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 4-5.

³⁰² Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 5.

³⁰³ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 8.

For Rodrigues da Silva the Gospel message provides the motivation for an ecclesial commitment to live and work in the Black community. Theologians must understand the difficulties of the Black community and immerse themselves in its cultural world that is charged with symbolic richness and mysticism.³⁰⁴ Liberation requires openness to Black experiences, including the belief in ancestors and Orixas that is mixed into popular Catholicism.³⁰⁵ The theologian's task is to contextualize the experience of faith and the liberating message of the Gospel in a theological reflection that is incarnated in history.³⁰⁶

The legacy of African religions has survived the centuries of the diaspora. It is by concrete practices that African religions survived in the silence of official history. The recovery of African identity through a connection to the ancestors and Orixas poses a challenge to the established theological order. For Rodrigues da Silva it is an open question whether there is a core resonance between African religious practices and officially preached Christianity.³⁰⁷ From the African perspective at the time of colonial slavery, the only possible option was to create a religious mixture capable of saving their past history and surviving in the present.³⁰⁸ Because this dual religious heritage informs the religious practices of the Black community today, a theology starting from the Black community must be able to account for it within its epistemological frame.³⁰⁹

For Brazilian theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, the primary tasks of Black theology are 1) to recover the memories of pain in order to denounce the damaging aspects of

³⁰⁴ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 5.

³⁰⁵ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 5.

³⁰⁶ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 6.

³⁰⁷ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 6-7.

³⁰⁸ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 7.

³⁰⁹ Rodrigues da Silva, “Una epistemología afroamericana,” 7.

Christian history for Black peoples, and 2) to discover the new faces of God that have been hidden by ethnocentric theology and can inspire a renewed Christian experience for Blacks.³¹⁰ She explains that Latin American racism has its roots in slavery and that racist ideology finds one of its origins in theological attempts to justify the institution of slavery.

During the colonial era repression and violence forced slaves who wished to maintain their ancestral religious practices to assume Catholicism outwardly in order to survive. De Lima Silva explains that this religious parallelism is not a mixing of traditions; rather, it is a double religious reality in which two worlds exist, distinct but not exclusive.³¹¹ Today those who share in both religious traditions do not experience feelings of contradiction between them, and those who encounter the ancestral religion newly describe it as an encounter with a part of themselves that had been lost or forgotten.³¹² While their Christian identity is still meaningful, the experience of the ancestral religions provides a needed connection to the collective memory of their people.³¹³

Although the days of theological justifications of slavery are long past, de Lima Silva is still able to find evidence of that racism in the theological language, liturgies, and hymns of the Christian faith. She recalls the images of the black heart and the white heart common in Sunday school classes that symbolize the sinful heart and the pure heart where Jesus lives. Similarly, she cites lyrics from a mid-twentieth-century hymnal that proclaim, “If your sins are black, I will make them white.”³¹⁴ Her concern is that children who are taught the Christian faith in this way

³¹⁰ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology: A New Way to Sense, to Feel, and to Speak of God,” in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone’s Black Theology and Black Power*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 191.

³¹¹ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 194.

³¹² De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 198.

³¹³ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 198.

³¹⁴ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 195.

from a young age will find it difficult to recognize “the worthiness of their culture and their value as a people.”³¹⁵

In response Black theology must make possible the recovery of the Black community’s identity and self-esteem. As one type of liberation theology, Black theology arises from the “collective experiences of the pain of racism and the presence of God within the struggles of resistance for dignity and life.”³¹⁶

Although the process of systematizing black theology is recent, de Lima Silva believes that black theology has existed since the arrival of the African slaves on the Latin American continent. But because it was transmitted orally without written doctrine, it has seldom been acknowledged by the Western academic theology tradition.³¹⁷ The Consultation on Black Culture and Theology at the 1985 conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) was an important milestone in the development of Black theology because it provided an opportunity for Black theologians from different countries to dialogue and to identify the similarities and differences of their experiences.³¹⁸

Articulating a theology grounded in the experience of Black women’s and men’s bodies and in the task of reconstructing a positive African identity disrupts the dominant culture. De Lima Silva claims that the Church has confused a racist hegemonic culture with the Christian faith.³¹⁹ Refusing to accept the totalizing White and Western values that define patterns of behavior, beauty, and theological production is a step toward dismantling racial

³¹⁵ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 195.

³¹⁶ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 196.

³¹⁷ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 195.

³¹⁸ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 196.

³¹⁹ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 197.

discrimination.³²⁰ De Lima Silva claims that Black theologians must foster “an attitude of permanent suspicion toward the religious values imposed by white Western Christianity,” as well as a new theological language that can express the religious experience of the Black community.³²¹

Black theology offers important contributions to Latin American Christianity. Just as the popular readings of the Bible enriched the earliest Latin American liberation theology, Black readings of the scriptures offer another expression of faith.³²² The God experienced in Black communities is one of fidelity and care who has journeyed with the Black community, suffered in their experience of pain, and celebrated their experiences of the fullness of life. This God is concerned with the body and with providing the basic necessities for life.³²³ The Black God also values the community as an extended family, the role of the elderly, the gifts of women, harmony with nature, and communion with the cosmos. De Lima Silva writes, “This God dances, sings, caresses, and embraces, is joyful in celebration, and likes the beautiful colors and the sound of drums.”³²⁴ The Black community offers these insights to the Church at large. The liturgy can be enlivened by celebrations that are “more participatory, more incarnational, alive, corporal, symbolic, and committed to memory and history.”³²⁵ The religious experience can liberate one’s relationship with one’s own body.³²⁶

³²⁰ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 196.

³²¹ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 196.

³²² De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 197.

³²³ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 198.

³²⁴ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 198.

³²⁵ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 197.

³²⁶ De Lima Silva, “Black Latin American Theology,” 199.

Missa dos Quilombos

Collaborators Pedro Casaldáliga and Pedro Tierra began work on their next project, the *Missa dos Quilombos*, after the premiere of the *Missa da terra sem males* in 1979. Like its predecessor that focused on the indigenous peoples of Brazil, this Mass acknowledges the long history of wrongs that the Catholic Church perpetrated against the Afro-Brazilian population. The *Missa* is an expression of repentance that names slavery and its legacy of coloniality as sins for which the Church must do penance.

The prominent Archbishop Dom Hélder Câmara³²⁷ encouraged Cassaldáliga and Tierra to write this Mass addressing the circumstances of the Afro-Brazilian population.³²⁸ Câmara and Casaldáliga both played active roles in the Fundação Centro de Educação Comunitária e Social do Nordeste (CECOSNE, the Foundation Center for Community and Social Education in the Northeast), an organization in Recife, Brazil founded in 1975 to connect church and social movements. Câmara and other artists, musicians, and poets met with Casaldáliga and Tierra at CECOSNE and developed the initial outlines of the Mass.³²⁹ They also decided that the premiere of the *Missa* should take place on the anniversary of Zumbi's death, the Brazilian Day of Black

³²⁷ Hélder Câmara (1909-1999) was archbishop of Olinda and Recife from 1964 until his retirement in 1985. The Roman Catholic Church has begun the process for his beatification and canonization. See “Celebração marca oficialmente abertura do processo de beatificação de dom Hélder Câmara,” *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil*, May 4, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20160519173847/http://www.cnbb.org.br/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16426:celebracao-marca-oficialmente-abertura-do-processo-de-beatificacao-de-dom-helder-camara&catid=112&Itemid=210.

³²⁸ Rafael Senra, “A Missa dos Quilombos: Produto Político, Religioso e Cultural,” *Darandina* 2, no. 3 (2009): 1, accessed April 4, 2015, <http://www.ufjf.br/darandina/files/2010/01/Rafael-Senra-.pdf>.

³²⁹ Marcelo Nassif, “Missa dos Quilombos, D. Helder Câmara, Invocação à Mariama,” *Blog do Bruxo*, June 9, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426043609/http://blogdobruxo.com.br/page/noticia/missa-dos-quilombos-d-helder-camara-invocacao-a-mariama-.> “Quem somos,” *CECOSNE*, accessed on Dec. 10, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426043844/http://www.cecosne.org.br/quemsomos.html>.

Consciousness.³³⁰ Câmara later introduced Casaldáliga and Tierra to their musical collaborator, popular Brazilian performer and composer Milton Nascimento.³³¹

Seven thousand people attended the premiere of the *Missa* on November 22, 1981 in the plaza in front of the Igreja do Carmo in the city of Recife in northeastern Brazil.³³² The location has deep historic resonance to the theme of the *Missa* since Domingos Jorge Vehlo had displayed the severed head of the ambushed Zumbi in that same plaza in 1695.³³³ Casaldáliga and Câmara co-presided at the liturgy with Archbishop José Maria Pires, the first black bishop of Brazil.³³⁴

In an interview by photojournalist and activist Mev Puleo, Pires explains that he came to an understanding of black consciousness as he was preparing for the Latin American Bishops' meeting in Puebla in 1978 and received a letter from a group of young Black activists who felt that the Church in Brazil looked down on Blacks and their cause. The activists closed their letter by writing: "As a black person, you are our brother. As a bishop, you are our adversary."³³⁵ Pires explains that he felt deeply moved by their words and since that time has dedicated his life to working for the cause of Blacks. After the premiere of the *Missa*, Pires claims that he felt honored to be given the nickname "Dom Zumbi" after Zumbi of Palmares.³³⁶

After its premiere the *Missa* encountered resistance in both political and religious spheres. The Brazilian government censored four tracks on the first recording, and the Vatican

³³⁰ Nassif, "Missa dos Quilombos."

³³¹ Romero Venâncio, "Milton Canta Zumbi na Missa Dos Quilombos: Notas," *Consciência.net*, last modified November 15, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426044305/http://consciencia.net/milton-canta-zumbi-na-missa-dos-quilombos-notas/>.

³³² Senra, "A Missa dos Quilombos," 1.

³³³ Venâncio, "Milton Canta Zumbi."

³³⁴ Mev Puleo, *The Struggle Is One: Voices and Visions of Liberation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 219.

³³⁵ Puleo, *The Struggle Is One*, 223-24.

³³⁶ Puleo, *The Struggle Is One*, 223.

prohibited the celebration of the Mass for almost ten years.³³⁷ Responding to a letter sent by conservative Catholics claiming that the *Missa* had communist tendencies, the Vatican notified the Brazilian National Conference of Bishops (CNBB) that the *Missa* “did not correspond with the meaning of the Eucharist.” The CNBB’s liturgical commission responded with a letter explaining that the additional songs and dances of the *Missa* did not violate liturgical norms. The Vatican, however, prohibited the celebration of the *Missa* without providing any further response.³³⁸ Brazilian philosopher Romero Venâncio explains that, “At no time in the history of Brazil was a mass the subject of such scrutiny from the press and heated debate in the public sphere.”³³⁹ According to Venâncio, the conservative element in the Brazilian church was not willing to tolerate a eucharistic celebration that honored the memory of a rebellious black slave during the era in which slavery was legal and enjoyed the Church’s blessing. The *Missa* was only reinstated for official use after the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops (Santo Domingo, 1992) focused on the importance of inculturation for evangelization. The conference promoted using expressions of local culture in liturgical celebrations and thus removed the restrictions that had led to the prohibition of the *Missa*.³⁴⁰

In his introduction to the Mass, Casaldáliga explains that the *Missa dos Quilombos* commemorates the death and resurrection of Black Peoples in the death and resurrection of Christ. The *Missa* expresses Casaldáliga’s and Tierra’s commitment to living in solidarity with people in Brazil who are suffering unjustly. Although this Mass is born from their experience in

³³⁷ Senra, “A Missa dos Quilombos,” 2.

³³⁸ Senra, “A Missa dos Quilombos,” 4.

³³⁹ Venâncio, “Milton Canta Zumbi.”

³⁴⁰ Senra, “A Missa dos Quilombos,” 5.

Brazil, the authors see it as a prophetic work that speaks to the hopes of Blacks in Africa, America, and around the world in solidarity with all people who are poor.³⁴¹

Casaldáliga's introduction states his premise clearly: "In the name of a supposedly white and colonizing God, whom Christian nations have adored as if He were the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, millions of Blacks have been subjected for centuries to slavery, to desperation, and to death."³⁴² Drawing on a favorite theme of liberation theologians, Casaldáliga uses the biblical story of the Exodus as a central image. He retells the history of slave resistance to the colonial government, especially the history of the quilombos, as a new version of the story of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. Palmares becomes the Black Sinai and Zumbi the Black Moses. Casaldáliga acknowledges that the Brazilian Christian community will have mixed responses to this Mass, explaining that "many Pharisees"³⁴³ will consider it scandalous while "many who are repentant" will be relieved by the long-overdue confession of Christian guilt.³⁴⁴

The *Missa* is divided into eleven sections: 1) "A de Ó (Estamos chegando)," a gathering procession, 2) "Em nome do Deus," a prayer addressing the Trinitarian God using the names of the orixas, 3) "Rito Penitencial," an extended Kyrie that forms the heart of the *Missa*, 4) "Aleluia," the Gospel acclamation that associates the liberation of blacks with the resurrection of Jesus, 5) "Ofertório," the offertory song that presents the suffering of the black community with the bread and wine brought to the altar, 6) "O Senhor é Santo," the Sanctus, appeals to the liberating kingdom in which all are equal under the reign of God, 7) "Rito da Paz," the Rite of

³⁴¹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa dos Quilombos."

³⁴² Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa dos Quilombos."

³⁴³ The derogatory use of the term "Pharisee" to represent one who poses as religiously observant but fails to internalize the heart of the Christian message is perhaps Casaldáliga's unconscious use of standard Christian language that reproduces an anti-Semitic message. Describing the Brazilian Catholics who disagree with the project of this Mass as Pharisees is shaded by the same supersessionist perspective that can be seen in the Rite of Peace of the *Missa da terra sem males* (see chapter 2 above).

³⁴⁴ Casaldáliga and Tierra, "Missa dos Quilombos."

Peace that names the true peace that can exist only after the liberation of all peoples, 8) “Comunhão,” the communion song that centers on the theme of unity within the Body of Christ, 9) “Ladainha,” a litany that calls upon the saints and all who have contributed to hope for Blacks, 10) “Louvação a Mariama,” a hymn of praise addressed to Mary as the poor and suffering woman through whom the savior came to the world, and 11) “Marcha Final (de banzo e esperança),” the Final March of resistance and hope that presents a vision of the kingdom of God as a New Quilombo.³⁴⁵

The powerful gathering song, “Estamos chegando” (“We are arriving”), speaks with the voices of the slaves of the past and the modern Afro-Brazilians who suffer in a racist society. It intends to honor the historical memory of the slaves and contribute to the formation of a modern Black consciousness.³⁴⁶ The authors constructed the many verses of the song using a parallel structure: each begins with two phrases that describe the conditions in which the people live, one phrase that describes one aspect of who the people are, and a final phrase that explains what they intend to do in this Mass. The first quatrain is as follows: “We are arriving from the depths of the earth/We are arriving from the womb of the night/Whipped flesh we are/We have come to remember.”³⁴⁷

Subsequent verses describe the passage across the sea from Africa to Brazil, the suffering and fear that were part of the daily lives of the slaves, the slaves’ work on the plantations and in the mines, as well as the modern realities of life in the favelas and work in factories that creates

³⁴⁵ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos,” and Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁴⁶ Teixeira, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁴⁷ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

wealth for the owners and investors but not the workers. The lyrics name the Church as a source of further suffering, not of solace: “We are bleeding from the cross of Baptism.”³⁴⁸

As the song progresses the lyrics shift from sadness and mourning to a new resolve and recognition of the people’s strength. This progression is evident in the last line of each verse (“We have come to...”): remember, weep, pray, nurture, eulogize, dance, sing, shimmy, collect, yell, cry out, and fight. Similarly, a spoken passage that interrupts three times between the verses declaims that from the exile those whose flesh had been sold and subjugated under the law of the whip can reach a new dawn and go to Palmares accompanied by the sound of the beating drums.³⁴⁹

“Em nome do Deus,” the second piece of music in the *Missa*, uses the sign of the cross that begins each Mass to present a blended multi-religious image. The “God of all names” is addressed as Yahweh, Obatalá, Olorum, and Oió. The latter titles are associated not with the supreme deity, Oloddumare, who is beyond human understanding, but with the orixas Obatalá, to whom Oloddumare assigned the task of sculpting human beings from clay, and Olorum, who represents the vital energies of sun, heat, and light that are essential for life.³⁵⁰

Emphasizing the commonalities among all human beings, “Em nome do Deus,” highlights aspects of the Christian tradition that can be understood as honoring dark skin: God, who loves without distinction, creates all people from tenderness and dust; God makes all

³⁴⁸ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁴⁹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁵⁰ Clara Luz Ajo Lázaro, “Jesus and Mary Dance with the *Orishas*,” in *Feminist Intercultural Theology: Latina Explorations for a Just World*, eds. María Pilar Aquino and Maria José Rosado-Nunes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 117. Clara Luz Ajo Lázaro, “The Spirituality of Our Ancestors,” in *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, eds. María Pilar Aquino and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 2000), 102. The name Oió is unclear due to the variety of local traditions and variations in spelling. This might be a reference to the Yoruba city of Oyó that is associated with the orixa Xangô.

people, black and white alike, with red blood; and Jesus, who was of the race of Abraham, was born with dark skin (“moreno”).³⁵¹

The lyrics continue the formula “In the name of...” beyond naming the three persons of the Trinity in the sign of the cross. The phrase also addresses “the People who wait in the grace of faith for the voice of Xangô [the orixa associated with lightning, male sexuality, and power³⁵²], the Quilombo-Easter that will liberate.” It honors the enslaved people who were exiled across the seas and those who are marginalized today on the docks, in the favelas, and even at the altars: the people who created Palmares and those who will create Palmares anew.³⁵³

Despite the authors’ best intentions, however, this piece may undercut the unique contributions of the African religious traditions that it attempts to honor. By echoing the tradition of religious blending within the context of a Catholic Mass, the authors bring African religious traditions under the umbrella of the Christian God. By considering the names of the orixas to be synonymous with the Christian God, Casaldáliga and Tierra tame and control them, restricting those parts of the orixas’ characters and identities that might operate differently from the Christian God. The authors use the image of the race of Abraham to signify a sibling relationship among Blacks and Whites but in doing so displace African stories of origin in favor of the Christian story.³⁵⁴

The extended “Rito Penitencial” is the heart of the *Missa*, functioning as a cry for help rather than a plea for the forgiveness of sins. Alternating between sung choral passages and

³⁵¹ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁵² Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 49.

³⁵³ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁵⁴ This illustrates the problem that Maricel Mena-López critiques as a racist tendency among biblical scholars who divide texts into those of historical or mythical origin based on racial considerations: Casaldáliga and Tierra appear to treat African traditions as myths while accepting the Judeo-Christian tradition as true. See p. 85 above.

recited solo sections, the piece laments the suffering of generations upon generations of Blacks in Brazil, describing the physical suffering experienced by both the slaves and the current day Afro-Brazilians living in poverty as well as the psychological suffering that results from having one's culture and historical memory scattered and devalued.

After the traditional invocation “Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison,” the piece establishes its intent to undo the traditional associations of color with religious worthiness: “The soul is not white, grief is not black.” The authors acknowledge the suffering caused by forced conversions to Christianity, criticizing both the baptisms that “branded the slaves with iron for salvation” and the intolerance that forced the slaves to hide their cultural and religious traditions. The chorus sings: “In fear – in fear of history – we burned our archives. We put our memories in white.” Later the soloist recites: “The Black was whitened for survival. (The White was blackened for mockery.) The whitened Black was gently killed by integration.”³⁵⁵

The piece acknowledges the injustices perpetuated by white governments and courts of law. It explains that Blacks have “a ‘right to burial’ without the right to life” and that they exist “without the right to be, to be a Black being.”³⁵⁶ The Golden Law, so called because it was signed with a golden pen, that granted emancipation to the Brazilian slaves in 1888 is noted as an example of injustice masquerading as generosity because it failed to undo the social, political, and economic inequality of the era of slavery.³⁵⁷

Like “Em nome do Deus,” the “Rito Penitencial” uses the Christian tradition of referring to Blacks as members of “the race of Ham” and descendants of Hagar and Ismael. This

³⁵⁵ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁵⁶ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

³⁵⁷ Leal, “Fárigá/Ìfaradà,” 296. In a similar criticism of the Golden Law, the “Rito da Paz” contrasts the false peace that was ceded by the law of abolition that established the current unjust race relations in Brazil with the coming true peace that has yet to be won. See Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

Christian-centric language has been used historically to justify the mistreatment of “the cursed race.” The authors contrast this language by equating the idea of the New Quilombo with the Kingdom of God. While they clearly intend to honor African heritage, they simultaneously undermine their efforts by failing to uproot the language that refers to Blacks as the cursed race.

The final recited section implores religious leaders, the learned priests and skilled nuns, not to deny the blood, the cry of the dead, the strength of the people, or the return to quilombos.³⁵⁸ The authors seem to want to honor the founders of the quilombos and the Afro-Brazilians of the present for their resistance to the degradation of slavery and the legacy of coloniality, as well as to call the Church to account for the past and present sins. Their focus on the quilombos, however, presents an ambiguous position: if Afro-Brazilians ought to return to the ideals of the quilombos that honored their African heritage in order to reclaim their human dignity, why should they not return to the totality of their African heritage, rejecting the imposed Christianity that caused so much suffering to their ancestors?

Conclusion

Studying and celebrating the history of the quilombos is one strategy for Afro-Brazilians to reclaim the identity that has been denied by the legacy of slavery. Even under the most difficult and degrading circumstances, African slaves did not simply submit to their masters and abdicate their right to live as free people. Some chose to escape and live outside the colonial system, knowing well that it could cost them their lives. Afro-Brazilians today can honor this history with pride and reclaim a moment of dignity from the otherwise demeaning colonial past.

Evaluating the work of the early colonial theologians in Brazil yields mixed results: they can be considered heroes for taking a more compassionate stance toward the slaves than that of

³⁵⁸ Casaldáliga and Tierra, “Missa dos Quilombos.”

their contemporaries or villains for failing to question the institution of slavery and the arbitrariness of their own privilege. Since the formal end of Brazilian slavery in 1888, the Church has largely been content to consider slavery a sin of the past. In this, however, it has failed to reckon with the legacy of coloniality that continues to function to the detriment of the Black community, restricting opportunities for education, economic advancement, and the development of the self-esteem that comes from honoring the history of one's people.

Casaldáliga, despite his limitations, takes on this ongoing legacy of coloniality in the *Missa dos quilombos*. As with the *Missa da terra sem males*, the apology of this Mass must come from the institution of the Church itself, and Casaldáliga rightly takes on that responsibility as a bishop and leader of the Church. His actions prophetically call the Church to greater fidelity to its own mission. This Mass, however, cannot be the Church's final word on the issues of the Afro-Brazilian community because it is still a Mass *for* and not *by* the Afro-Brazilian community. It is a top-down approach that does not allow Afro-Brazilians to articulate their own theology or focus on the issues that are most relevant to their communities. Perhaps after the Mass premiered in 1981 Casaldáliga could have called together a group of Afro-Brazilians and asked them to create a liturgy in response to the *Missa dos quilombos*. It was only in 2011, thirty years after the premiere of the *Missa dos quilombos*, that the *Missa da Consciência Negra*, a Mass created by Afro-Brazilian artists, premiered in São Paolo. This Mass will be analyzed in the epilogue.

By blending Christian and African religious worldviews, *Missa dos quilombos* speaks meaningfully to the religious experiences of some Afro-Brazilians. As Silvia Regina de Lima Silva explains, some individuals participate in both religious traditions without experiencing a sense of contradiction. For these dual-practitioners Casaldáliga's tendency to blend the traditions

and to merge the names of many deities into one identity might seem perfectly reasonable. For other practitioners who maintain African religious traditions but do not accept Christianity, the *Missa* might seem to co-opt and distort their religious heritage. While Casaldáliga's intended audience likely consisted of the former group—Afro-Brazilian Catholics who would be likely to attend a Mass—rather than the latter, the apology for the legacy of slavery and discrimination falls short if it is only directed to Catholics and not the entire Afro-Brazilian community.

It is for contemporary Afro-Brazilian theologians to decide in what ways African religious traditions inform Christian theology. If the lived experience of Afro-Brazilians draws from multiple sources, then formal theology must be able to take that into account. Taking an overly romanticized view of either the history of the Church or the history of African resistance and survival from the quilombos creates a caricature of the past and becomes a faulty foundation for the future. Human communities, whether they are the colonial Church or the Quilombo of Palmares, have both positive and negative attributes, and responsible theology needs to account for both. Casaldáliga's example of asking forgiveness for the sins of the Church is an important model that should not be forgotten in the ongoing work of theologians who speak for and with the institution.

Chapter 4

From Women's Invisibility to the Claim “*Estamos aquí/We are here*”

Latin American liberation theology developed in response to the lived experience of poverty widely present across the region. Motivated by the biblical mandate to care for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger, liberation theology begins its reflection from the “underside of history,” from the lives of people who are poor and lack social, political, and ecclesial influence. The theme of justice occupies the core of liberation theology and shapes its methodology. By identifying and analyzing entrenched oppressive structures, liberation theologians hope to encourage people to recognize their own agency and join together in the struggle for justice. Yet Christian women soon discovered that these commitments alone were not enough. Those who participated in the early liberation theology movement realized that the new theology failed to address important issues and continued to promote certain types of oppressive behaviors.

The first section of this chapter traces the emergence of feminist theology in Latin America beginning with a timeline of key feminist theologians, significant themes, and important developments. The second section of the chapter focuses on the importance of the celebration of rituals to women’s groups in Latin America. The creative expressions—music, art, dance, poetry, symbolic action, and drama—that feature prominently in women’s rituals play a significant role in deconstructing patriarchal images of God, calling attention to the experiences of daily life, honoring the body, and envisioning a new society that respects the inherent dignity in each human life and in the natural world. The third section of the chapter analyzes several rituals created by the women of the Con-spirando Collective in Santiago, Chile. These rituals address many of the issues raised by the liturgies analyzed in the earlier chapters of this work while drawing the concerns of feminist theology into the mix. Through their explicit content,

leadership models, and styles of celebration, these liturgies represent a renewal of the Christian tradition and the hope that it may be an ally, rather than an obstacle, to the struggles for justice and the fullness of life.

Development of Feminist Theology in Latin America

The earliest authors of liberation theology in Latin America were Roman Catholic priests who were trained in the seminaries of Europe (Gustavo Gutiérrez and Juan Luis Segundo) as well as some Protestant ministers (José Míguez Bonino), who were generally trained in the United States. In their studies, they absorbed and internalized the dominant theological language and preoccupations of that time. While they recognized that theology created in Latin America, outside the centers of power, would be significantly different from the theology that they had studied, they failed to understand the diversity of lived experience in Latin America. Although early liberation theology emphasized the social nature of sin, its anthropology and cosmology remained patriarchal. Ivone Gebara explains that although liberation theology critiques Euro-centered universalism, it continues to perpetuate androcentric universalism, which is the result of the educational formation of most male liberation theologians.³⁵⁹ Gebara calls for the inclusion of women in the production of knowledge in order to create a change in liberation theology's epistemological horizon.

Pilar Aquino insists that the experience of poor women is different from that of poor men. Women suffer domination, racist subjugation, growing impoverishment, and systematic exclusion as do men, but in addition to that they suffer under the *machista* patriarchal legacy.³⁶⁰ Rosanna Panizo, a feminist theologian from Peru, explains that the patriarchal frameworks that

³⁵⁹ Cited in Mary Judith Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 39.

³⁶⁰ María Pilar Aquino, *Our Cry for Life: Feminist Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 31.

govern the production of culture and knowledge need to be uprooted by feminist approaches. She writes, “At this time in our history the classical social theories used by liberation theologies are not sufficient to explain the concrete social realm and the need to change the subordination of the women in Latin America.”³⁶¹ For this reason she calls for the creation of new tools for theologizing and engaging in pastoral work.

For Aquino, efforts to create egalitarian ways for human beings to live together cannot allow for the subordination of one cause to another. Latin Americans cannot continue to sustain a hierarchy of evils, in which women’s oppression is considered a minor or circumstantial problem. The failure of liberation theology to recognize the oppression of women is a contradiction because liberation theology assumes the principle of total liberation and fullness of life for the poor and oppressed. Just as theology that claims to be above history ends up identifying with the dominant power, theology that ignores the power differential between men and women ends up supporting patriarchy. Aquino also critiques as inadequate the early liberation theologians’ use of abstract, generic terms such as ‘the people’ or ‘the socioeconomic poor.’ She explains: “Until recently, class-based social relations and economic structures have been presented as the determinant factors of human experience and as the central categories of intellectual formulation… These understandings are not only reductionist, they are also insufficient, because they fail to give a full account of the alternative practices and socioreligious perceptions provided by social groups that seek to affect the current social reality.”³⁶²

Mexican theologian Elsa Tamez emphasizes that if one accepts the need for contextual theology, theological work becomes ongoing and open-ended. She explains, “A hermeneutical

³⁶¹ Rosanna Panizo, “Women in Peru: Making the Invisible Visible,” in *Women’s Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action*, ed. Ofelia Ortega (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 63.

³⁶² María Pilar Aquino, “Latin American Feminist Theology,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 14, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 89.

approach is not something fixed once and for all, but something living, which must constantly respond to the challenges of social, economic and cultural reality.”³⁶³ Theology must be relevant to both the events of history and the subjects who make that history. In “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics: A Retrospective,” Tamez describes three periods in the development of feminist theology in Latin America that correspond roughly to the decades of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Mary Judith Ress succinctly summarizes Tamez’s three periods as follows:

Feminist consciousness within Latin American theology evolved from the total identification of women theologians and biblical scholars with liberation theology (first stage), to a growing awareness of—and discomfort with—liberation theology’s patriarchal mindset (second stage), to challenging the patriarchal anthropology and cosmology present in liberation theology itself and calling for a total reconstruction of theology from a feminist perspective.³⁶⁴

The following section is based on Tamez’s timeline augmented by Ress.

During the 1970s left-wing political activism strongly influenced the religious communities seeking justice. As countries across the region faced severe political repression and saw the formation of left-wing grassroots movements and solidarity groups, people began to gather in base communities to reflect on biblical texts from their own experiences. In both Catholic and Protestant communities, popular reading of the Bible became the focus of theological reflection, and a practical commitment to ecumenism developed among members of many denominations based on their joint struggle for justice for the victims of political repression.³⁶⁵ Although the Latin American bishops had demonstrated their support for liberation theology in the Medellín conference, by the end of the 1970s the Vatican began its crackdown on liberation theologians.

³⁶³ Elsa Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics: A Retrospective,” in *In Women’s Visions: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action*, ed. Ofelia Ortega (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 77.

³⁶⁴ Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America*, 7.

³⁶⁵ Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics,” 78-79.

The women involved in the early liberation theology movement were often nuns and pastoral agents who worked with the poor. Very few of these women had advanced academic training in theology. They recognized the potential of this new theology that promoted the preferential option for the poor and the opportunity to read biblical texts from the perspective of the poor, and they were enthusiastically committed to participating at the grassroots level in liberation theology's methods and practices.

Although women initially saw themselves within the broader category of the poor and presumed that egalitarian relations between the sexes would be one aspect of the new society coming into being, they gradually began to apply the insights of liberation theology to themselves as a group. Tamez explains that they began to "discover themselves as historical subjects who were oppressed and discriminated against, but also capable of liberation and theological production."³⁶⁶ As they developed their feminist consciousness, these women realized that their struggles as women and the wider struggle for economic and political liberation needed to be addressed simultaneously. During this first phase in the development of Latin American feminist theology, Tamez explains that there was little communication with the secular feminist movement in Latin America or with feminist theologians abroad.

During the decade of the 1980s, which corresponds with Tamez's second stage and the Reagan administration in the United States, political repression throughout the Latin American region increased dramatically. Political parties and regimes were not the only targets of the anti-communist rhetoric from the United States: the Washington-based Council for Inter-American Security published the Santa Fe documents in 1980 and 1988 that specifically described clergy,

³⁶⁶ Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 79.

theologians, and base communities as dangerous.³⁶⁷ The Vatican began silencing liberation theologians, including Brazilian Leonardo Boff, and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published the first “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation’” on August 6, 1984 condemning liberation theology.³⁶⁸

During this time women began to receive more theological training and to engage in theological production in increasing numbers. As they experienced a growing awareness of and discomfort with liberation theology’s patriarchal mindset, these women identified the androcentric anthropology that lies at the heart of the mainstream Christian theological tradition and considers the male experience as the norm for all human beings. Feminists insisted that it was no longer acceptable to speak *about* women as if they were passive objects of reflection; women needed to articulate their own theology emerging from their consciousness and experience.³⁶⁹

Feminist theologians challenged liberation theologians’ emphasis on economic oppression and the preferential option for the poor as a universalized category. The focus on economics often hid issues such as sexism, racism, and cultural oppression. Tamez highlights three aspects of feminist biblical scholarship that were prominent during these years: 1) the search for female images of God and the freedom to recognize God’s activity in daily life; 2) the affirmation of virtues traditionally tied to women, such as tenderness, unselfishness, and care;

³⁶⁷ Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics,” 81.

³⁶⁸ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Instruction on Certain Aspects of the ‘Theology of Liberation,’” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 1984, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

³⁶⁹ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 65.

and 3) the critical analysis of biblical texts that were clearly patriarchal and the freedom to dismiss a text as non-normative if it could not be interpreted in a more inclusive manner.³⁷⁰

During these years the emerging Latin American feminist theologians expanded their networks and alliances. As Black and indigenous theologians began articulating theology from the particularities of their own contexts, feminist theologians acknowledged the reality of interlocking oppressions. Also during this period Latin American theologians began to engage the work of feminist theologians from Europe and the United States. Although many were uncomfortable with the term feminist because of its association with the United States and Europe, the term gained popularity as more women acknowledged connections with feminist theologians abroad and the secular feminist movement.³⁷¹

Tamez's the third phase emerges in the 1990s as a number of factors put pressure on liberation theology. The collapse of communist governments in Eastern Europe had widespread repercussions across Latin America. As the neo-liberal capitalist order consolidated its control, privatization excluded an increasing segment of the population from economic advancement. The new economic order dismantled state organizations that provided services for those in need, and women suffered disproportionately under the policy changes.³⁷² The Catholic bishops' conference in Santo Domingo in 1992 lacked the social and political critique that characterized its predecessors in Medellín in 1968 and Puebla 1979. The rise of Pentecostalism throughout Latin America also had a significant impact on the Catholic and mainline Protestant churches.

³⁷⁰ Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 83.

³⁷¹ Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 83.

³⁷² Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 84.

Ress relates a common aphorism from the time: “Liberation theology may have opted for the poor, but the poor have opted for Pentecostalism.”³⁷³

Indigenous movements across Latin America used the 500th anniversary of the European invasion of the Americas as occasion to organize and protest the cultural imperialism that functions within theology as well. Tamez cites indigenous theologian Aiban Wawa who explains that liberation theology’s “option for the poor” could be better described as “the option for the impoverished other” if it is to represent the complexities of oppression. Across Latin America Black theologians likewise increased theological production.

Tamez characterizes the third phase as one that favors the reconstruction of theological paradigms in a radical anti-patriarchal approach that is inclusive, holistic, and diverse. She borrows Ivone Gebara’s expression *holistic ecofeminism* to name the third phase. Tamez notes that many feminist theologians have experienced a sense of uneasiness about theological output, recognizing that the discipline is still working within the parameters of patriarchal discourse. Gebara explains that many have been engaged in “patriarchal feminist theology” and sets the task as the reconstruction of the discipline of theology as a whole.³⁷⁴ As traditional theological themes, such as creation, Christology, the Trinity, and ecclesiology, are rearticulated, Tamez recognizes that “the implications of reconstruction take us beyond orthodoxy.”³⁷⁵ For Tamez a major concern is the fact that as feminist theological work becomes more professionalized, it risks losing the connection with popular religion and the concerns of the majority of Christian women. If the distance between the academy and the church pews cannot be bridged, the

³⁷³ Ress, *Ecofeminism in Latin America*, 12.

³⁷⁴ Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics,” 85.

³⁷⁵ Tamez, “Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics,” 86.

renewed articulation of Christian theology is of little use.³⁷⁶ Among the ways of bridging the distance, Tamez highlights creative presentations of meditations and poetic reflections, symbolically rich combinations of liturgy and biblical reflection, and dramas in which the whole community can participate.³⁷⁷

Lo cotidiano

Within the discourse of feminist theology, *lo cotidiano* (daily life) is a central category of analysis. Feminist theology arises from women's experience of marginalization and oppression, and thus daily life provides feminist theology its *raison d'être*. Feminist theology aims to respond to the experience of suffering by analyzing and critiquing the conditions from which suffering arises and offering a liberating alternative path. Unlike traditional theology, it does not aim to address a pre-set list of doctrinal concepts; it addresses these issues only as they impinge on women's lived experience. Feminist theologians understand the struggle for liberation from suffering to be central to the theological agenda and consider unmasking the coercive use of power and envisioning and enacting new models of social interaction to be primary goals.

The analysis of daily life includes, but is not limited to, the events that occur in the domestic sphere. Feminist theologians acknowledge the flow of influence between the household and the public sphere. Economic, social, political, and cultural perspectives shape the experience within the domestic sphere, while the patterns of interaction learned in the home shape public life. Aquino writes, "Liberation theology is a critical reflection on all historical activity combatting forms of oppression, impoverishment, death, and inhumanity suffered by people

³⁷⁶ Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 87.

³⁷⁷ Tamez, "Latin American Feminist Hermeneutics," 87.

because of unjust structures. It begins with the particular struggles of the oppressed in their efforts to construct more equal and participatory forms of life.”³⁷⁸

Traditional theology tends to underestimate the influence of the domestic sphere on public life, yet feminist theologians claim the focus on daily life is essential to their critique. Aquino writes, “[I]t is necessary to reclaim for the liberation project *all* forms of struggle for life engaged in by women. They show up the capitalist system’s inability to respond to the vital needs of the poor and provide basic human rights for women.”³⁷⁹ Daily struggles within the domestic sphere provide evidence that the existing social structures are oppressive and must be subverted. By assuming a unidirectional flow of influence from public to private spheres, traditional theology masks the reality of women’s lives. Traditional views of history have often hidden women’s daily actions to resist oppression and, in this way, deprived women of a public voice. Liberation theologies broadly, and feminist theologies specifically, encourage the oppressed to become aware of their own interests and honor the memory of their struggles.³⁸⁰

For feminist theologians, the traditional theological categories (anthropology, Christology, soteriology, eschatology, etc.) are inadequate for two reasons: first, they have only been examined through the viewpoint of the powerful Western male, and second, they have failed to address many significant human experiences. Traditional theology fails to acknowledge the realities that make up human lives and, as a result, fails to give appropriate guidance in making moral decisions.

Taking the experiences of daily life seriously is an important corrective that illuminates the weaknesses of traditional theology. Focusing exclusively on the traditional categories of

³⁷⁸ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 62.

³⁷⁹ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 20.

³⁸⁰ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 15, 19.

theological study leaves large and important areas of life unexamined. In addition, the analysis of daily life challenges the tendency on the part of traditional theology to avoid or spiritualize Christians' daily lives.³⁸¹ By including daily experience within the scope of theology, feminist theologies can broaden the base and correct some of the omissions of traditional theology. Similarly, by enlarging the scope of critique, theology's ability to inspire social change increases. Theology written "from below" allows for a critique of the theological consciousness that has legitimated "from above" forms of oppression including racism, sexism, classism, imperialism, and colonialism.

Comparing the position of women in society to that of women in the churches can be a helpful barometer for measuring the effects of Christian theology on women's flourishing. Writing from Cuba, Ofelia Ortega, a Presbyterian minister and former World Council of Churches President for Latin America and the Caribbean, explains that churches have not kept pace with the advancements women have made in secular society. Although Cuban women enjoy high status in education and professional positions, within the churches "women remain subject to almost total male domination in all organizations and structures."³⁸²

Aquino enumerates the ways in which traditional theology is complicit with structures of oppression. Broadly speaking, the relative importance of theological issues changes based on one's epistemological position. Certain theologically relevant issues are harder to see from the dominant position; thus, consideration of multiple viewpoints is crucial to the development of an integrated, liberative theology. Aquino critiques traditional theology as "logocentric," elitist, and

³⁸¹ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 110.

³⁸² Ofelia Miriam Ortega, "Influence of the Missionary Heritage on Cuban Culture," *International Review of Mission* 74, no. 295 (1985): 347.

impositional.³⁸³ The discourse of Western, capitalist, white, male culture excludes other conversation partners. Those who “did not faithfully repeat its own [words] or speak its language” were considered beyond the theological pale. The traditional discourse imposed its conquering and colonial logic.³⁸⁴

Feminist theologians claim there is no perspective or school of thought that is neutral or without preconditioning. For feminist liberation theologians the act of claiming one’s location and purpose for doing theology is crucial. Aquino explains, “Theology claiming to be above history, or theology that is not conscious of its premises, ends up identifying with the dominant power in the church and society.”³⁸⁵

Focusing on everyday experiences allows feminist theologians to expand the field of theological investigation beyond purely rational concepts. Desire, tenderness, and warmth are incorporated into the purview of theology because they are part of real life.³⁸⁶ A purely conceptual approach cannot explain people’s loyalties and devotion, and it lacks the ability to motivate the continuing struggle against oppression. Focusing on the experiences of daily life also highlights the complexity and messiness of human life that inevitably arise from the oppositions and contradictions of human interaction. Gebara explains that life is the “simultaneous experience of oppression and liberation, of grace and lack of grace. Such perception encompasses what is plural, what is different, what is other...”³⁸⁷ Allowing only one theological voice to speak for this complexity would surely misrepresent the reality of human existence and reduce the richness of dialogue into a single, totalizing expression.

³⁸³ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 72-74.

³⁸⁴ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 96, 150.

³⁸⁵ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 81-82.

³⁸⁶ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 114.

³⁸⁷ Quoted in Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 119.

Feminists are motivated by additional theological insights to expand the field of discourse. Aquino explains that in the Christian tradition divine revelation is an ongoing process that is not exhausted in the biblical writings. This understanding validates and gives meaning to everyday experience. If revelation is ongoing in the lives of ordinary people, then those lives are meaningful and worthy of theological engagement. If revelation continues to operate in historical processes, then the struggle for human liberation is imperative.³⁸⁸

When disconnected from the reality of human life, even potentially liberating aspects of the Christian tradition can become distanced and untrustworthy. Using very different styles, both Aquino and Marcella Althaus-Reid criticize practices of the veneration of Mary that neutralize her human integrity for such practices they say do not promote women's liberation but rather confirm their oppression.³⁸⁹ Althaus-Reid shares the reflections of a group of poor women in a Bible study group in Buenos Aires. When asked if they identified with the Virgin Mary in their sufferings, one replied, "No, because she has expensive clothes and jewels, she is white and she does not walk."³⁹⁰ Althaus-Reid criticizes the role that an oppressive theology of Mary played in the hands of the colonizers conquering the indigenous peoples and in the hands of modern Latin American military dictators who have made deliberate efforts to appear in public worshipping her statues with devotion.³⁹¹ Althaus-Reid explains that these oppressive roles for Mary can be exploited only because she has been disembodied, made passive, and separated from her sexuality. Had the popular image of Mary been grounded in the real experiences of human women, she could not have been coopted for oppressive and totalizing purposes.

³⁸⁸ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 122.

³⁸⁹ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 173.

³⁹⁰ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology: Readings on Poverty, Sexual Identity and God* (London: SCM Press, 2004), 30.

³⁹¹ Althaus-Reid, *From Feminist Theology to Indecent Theology*, 41.

Aquino explains that theology can take a cue from popular religiosity as to its appropriate scope of investigation. She writes, “Women’s religiosity is not separate from the rest of their lives.”³⁹² It is one dimension that gives their lives meaning by acknowledging the presence of the sacred in daily events. Popular religiosity is not limited by the traditional categories of theological doctrine; rather, it arises in response to the significant events in human life, such as births, deaths, rites of passage, celebrations, and times of mourning. More significantly, she writes, “Women do not mobilize on the basis of a theoretical interpretation of their situation but because of very personal matters that affect their personal lives.”³⁹³

Ecofeminism

One of the central insights of Gebara’s holistic ecofeminism is the awareness of the interconnectedness and interdependence of everything in the cosmos. This perspective recognizes the damage that has been done over the long history of the Christian tradition by a mindset filled with hierarchically paired dualisms. Early Christian theology inherited a tradition of Greek philosophy that valued mind over body, rationality over emotion, man over woman, and man over nature. This perspective was accentuated during the Enlightenment as philosophers and scientists, such as Descartes and Newton, sought to describe the human as a rational and autonomous being and the laws of nature as mechanical and absolute. Ecofeminism recognizes the harm done by this fragmented, hierarchical vision and seeks to replace it with a holistic, integrated vision that restores women, subjugated men, children, nonhuman animals, all of nature, and the Earth itself to a place of respect.

Embodiment, human and otherwise, is a central theme in ecofeminism and has elicited a new theological anthropology starting with the bodies of oppressed people as a locus for

³⁹² Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 179.

³⁹³ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 183.

theological insight. Theologians seek to recover the sacredness of the body that has been denied in the dominant Christian theological tradition. The consequences of environmental degradation are experienced in human bodies as toxins are absorbed through air, water, and food that is grown in contaminated soil. These contaminants lead to ill health, developmental problems, and early death. Women, as caretakers of families and as the majority of persons living in poverty, experience these problems firsthand. Ivone Gebara sees how bodies are affected not just by unemployment and economic hardship but also by the harmful effects the system of industrial exploitation imposes on them. The suffering of the poor is linked to the destruction of their lands. Movement from rural areas into the cities in search of jobs creates overcrowded urban areas in which racism increases and governments become increasingly militarized. She discovers the root of her ecofeminist theology in the daily experience of those with diminishing access to green space, safe drinking water, and adequate food and health care.

Gebara's first step is to reshape the understanding of the place of humans within the cosmos, as one species among many others. She points to the classical Christian theological tradition that sees the creation story in Genesis as a mandate to dominate the Earth and subdue it. Reorienting our perspective toward interdependence and relationality creates a different ethical framework to guide our interactions with the rest of creation. While patriarchy has tended to view both women and the earth as ethical non-subjects, an ecofeminist orientation reframes ethical paradigms. If relatedness is taken as the highest ethical principle, then all beings can take their rightful place in establishing equitable relationships.

Taking seriously the claim of radical unity, Gebara challenges her inherited theological tradition by suggesting that nothing – not even evil – is outside the unity that is symbolized by the concept of Trinity. She writes, “If we say the Trinity envelops all as an expression of our

single and multiple reality, we will also have to include evil within it.”³⁹⁴ Her ecofeminist vision does not identify evil as an external reality to be eliminated, nor does she accept the description of evil as the will of God.³⁹⁵ Rather than pointing to the other as the source of evil, Gebara believes that individuals must recognize that what they call evil is within each person. Extending her claim of radical unity even further, she includes Jesus within that unity: “In this sense, I am saying that Jesus as an individual person is not superior to any other human being. This is because he is made of the same earth, the same bodily reality that constitutes us all.”³⁹⁶ This statement exhibits two of Gebara’s recurring themes: challenging the Christian theological tradition that considers Jesus a transcendent being and returning the theological focus to grounded, bodily reality.

Gebara is even resistant to understanding God as wholly other because it exempts believers from taking responsibility for dealing with the oppressed. She critiques the rising popularity of fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and charismatic groups throughout Latin America because she feels that these groups fail to connect with the reality of people’s suffering and the societal structures that cause it. Rather than fostering a climate of social engagement among believers, she finds these churches promote the idea that “solutions to personal problems come from extraterrestrial beings, ahistorical entities who respond only if they are invoked with fervor and insistence.”³⁹⁷ Characterizing God as primarily transcendent and distant rather than immanent and present runs the risk of justifying the avoidance of ethical struggle.

³⁹⁴ Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 162.

³⁹⁵ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 164.

³⁹⁶ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 190.

³⁹⁷ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 202.

Ultimately, for Gebara, unity provides the motivation for engaging in the ethical struggle against systems of domination. She writes, “I am convinced that if we were to try to develop this idea of cosmic and terrestrial citizenship, we could more easily overcome the different strains of racism, antiracism, xenophobia, exclusion, violence, and sexism that are rife in our cultures.”³⁹⁸

Why rituals?

Pilar Aquino notes that the creation of new symbols and language associated with feminist perspectives have renewed celebrations of faith in Christian communities in recent years. As women design liturgical celebrations, they draw attention to the issues that are most pressing in their lives, including the struggles for survival, flourishing life, justice, and peace. Music, poetry, and popular theater are vehicles for women’s liturgical creativity and challenge the androcentric character of traditional Christian liturgy.³⁹⁹

Afro-Brazilian feminist theologian Silvia Regina de Lima Silva identifies liturgy as a critical space for women who seek to dismantle the patriarchal world “from below and from within.”⁴⁰⁰ By creating contextually relevant liturgies that are meaningful to their lives, groups of women redefine liturgy, reclaiming it from the oppressive purposes it has served in the past and imagining new and liberating possibilities.

Although women’s rituals often take place outside traditional liturgical spaces such as sanctuaries or chapels, the new setting does not necessarily indicate a rupture with the Christian tradition. For many groups of Christian women, the separation from traditional liturgical spaces allows for the exploration of different styles of shared leadership, greater openness in language,

³⁹⁸ Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 158.

³⁹⁹ Aquino, *Our Cry for Life*, 50.

⁴⁰⁰ Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom: Wisdom Rituals and Liturgies as Spiritual Resources in the Struggle for Justice” in *In the Power of Wisdom*, ed. María Pilar Aquino and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (London: SCM Press, 2000), 120.

and greater flexibility in attending to issues that are personally relevant. Other groups explore forms of spirituality beyond the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy, while still others leave the Christian tradition behind as they develop a new worldview. In all cases the liturgies are notable for including poetry, art, music, dance, and drama.

For de Lima Silva, choosing a new location for liturgy reflects an important theological insight: “It is an invitation to come out from the space traditionally understood as sacred to meet Wisdom out in the open, in the streets and squares, in mass demonstrations, in family celebrations, in daily life.”⁴⁰¹ This decision carries ethical implications: identifying the presence of the sacred in the ordinary affirms one’s commitment to promote justice and honor human dignity. If the activities of one’s daily life can be seen as important in a liturgical context, the liturgy that emerges “invokes and celebrates the presence of Wisdom in our struggle as companions for justice.”⁴⁰² Women’s rituals are often located outdoors in natural settings, and de Lima Silva sees this as an important corrective to traditional Christianity that has been overly focused on revelation based on the Word of God and has undervalued the setting of that revelation.⁴⁰³

While traditional religious symbols, such as candles or the cross, figure importantly in women’s rituals, the symbolic language of these liturgies often differs greatly from that which institutional churches have handed down through the centuries. De Lima Silva highlights the use of symbols that emerge from concrete circumstances and are “consecrated through their very use and repetition.”⁴⁰⁴ Flowers might symbolize the lives of individuals, including those disappeared

⁴⁰¹ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 121.

⁴⁰² De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 122.

⁴⁰³ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 125.

⁴⁰⁴ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 121.

by military regimes, and torn petals might represent women experiencing domestic violence.

Symbols can cross from small group rituals to wider social movements and vice versa.

Argentinean journalist Dafne Plau describes an annual demonstration in Rio de Janeiro in which people dressed in white hold two minutes of silence to commemorate the victims of violent deaths and express the community's hope for peace and justice.⁴⁰⁵ In some instances, objects traditionally considered sacred are used differently. In a liturgy of Afro-Latin Americans, for instance, a Bible wrapped in chains may symbolize the religious traditions that participated in the institution of slavery and that are still complicit with sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination today.⁴⁰⁶

De Lima Silva understands the collective sins of racism, sexism, and classism at their core to be a denial of the dignity of bodies. Consequently, she sees the importance of liturgical experiences that allow women to reclaim and celebrate their bodies. Rituals can provide space to “release suffocated cries, silenced words, and unexpressed desires” and thereby move toward liberation and health.⁴⁰⁷ As each woman learns to love her own body and cherish it as a work of divine creation, she is strengthened for the task of loving and caring for the bodies of others.

Liturgies allow women the opportunity to recount their stories and break their former silence.⁴⁰⁸ De Lima Silva describes liturgical action as a process that extends backward in time to reclaim ancestors:

In these celebrations we name prophetic women great and small, simple women living everyday lives, sanctified by their daring to think beyond what was permitted them. Women who died of loneliness, others who were victims of violence, overt or concealed: their blood cries out for justice; their screams echo in the silences of a society that still

⁴⁰⁵ Cited in Ofelia Ortega, “Peace in the City,” *The Ecumenical Review* 55, no. 3 (2003): 242.

⁴⁰⁶ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 121-2.

⁴⁰⁷ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 125.

⁴⁰⁸ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 122.

murders. These women were a living and transforming presence in history; when their names are called out, we all answer, ‘Present’, as we believe that those who have gone from this life committed to the struggle for justice carry on their liberating commitment through our bodies and communities and walk with us in love.⁴⁰⁹

By honoring the memory of those who suffered without recourse to justice in social, political, and religious systems, these liturgies belatedly redress some of the harm done. Linking the struggles of the past with the present provides strength for continuing the struggle. In this way liturgy acts as a subversive memory.⁴¹⁰

Liturgy is also a festival that allows for an experience of joy even in times of trouble and adversity. De Lima Silva explains, “Liturgy is an anticipation of what we believe in, of the world of justice and equality that has still not come into being.”⁴¹¹ It is a utopian vision that becomes a goal to work toward. Walter Altmann, a Brazilian Lutheran theologian, describes liturgies as occasions to honor the voices of oppressed groups, including the indigenous peoples, blacks, and women, and to witness their testimonies of resistance and capacities for survival. He explains, “We celebrate our hope in our liturgies through our festive songs in our peoples, with our prayers and biblical reflections, in which the doxological and eschatological unite. The ultimate dignity of the human being cannot be crushed; all totalitarian governments have experienced this fact.”⁴¹² A shared meal gives an opportunity to replenish strength while a shared vision replenishes hope.

⁴⁰⁹ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 123.

⁴¹⁰ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 122.

⁴¹¹ De Lima Silva, “In the Movement of Wisdom,” 123.

⁴¹² Cited in Ofelia Ortega, “Mission as an Invitation for Life,” *International Review of Mission* 88, no. 348/349 (1999): 95.

Cuaderno de Ritos

In 1995 the Con-spirando Collective published a *Cuaderno de Ritos* (Notebook of Rites).

Women of various religious traditions, political affiliations, and cultural backgrounds formed Con-spirando inspired by their shared feminism and interest in exploring their spirituality. Whether they were associated with church communities or not, these women felt that their spirituality exceeded the boundaries of religious institutions and that their needs were not being met in any of their ecclesial, social, or political affiliations.

The preface of the *Cuaderno* explains that members of the collective began meeting in 1991 in Santiago, Chile to create a space in which they could freely express how they experienced the sacred in their lives. “We wanted to celebrate,” they write, “We needed it.”⁴¹³ As the women of Con-spirando began celebrating their rituals, they became aware of groups of women around the world who participated in similar communities and were encouraged to find that they were part of a cultural current of women seeking to develop communal spaces of self-determination.⁴¹⁴

Emphasizing equality and shared responsibility, the rituals designed by the women of the collective are circle rituals conducted without a priest, spiritual director, or teacher. Creating a space outside of church communities and beyond ecclesiastical authority did not, however, mean that these women cut ties with their communities. They continue to recognize both the Christian roots and indigenous heritage of Latin America and explain: “We seek in these sources those elements that help us to be freer and to live in relationships of mutuality. And we are prepared to leave aside all the elements that contribute to staining unjust and oppressive societies.”⁴¹⁵

⁴¹³ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno de ritos*, ([Santiago, Chile?]: Colectivo Con-spirando, 1995), iv.

⁴¹⁴ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, v.

⁴¹⁵ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, v.

Recognizing that traditions are cultural creations, these women claimed their right as human beings to invent and create the liberating and connective aspects that are lacking in the present day church and society. They see themselves inaugurating a new awareness and model of relationship in their rituals that might someday be acknowledged as the tradition.

In the introduction to the *Cuaderno*, Con-spirando members Josefina Hurtado Neira and Ute Seibert-Cuadra explain that the group chose to call their celebrations *ritos*, rites, rather than masses, liturgies or *cultos* (the typical term in Spanish for Protestant worship services) because they did not want to appear to be in competition with or seem to replace the other types of religious celebrations. The Con-spirando rites were designed to attend to the important moments in these women's lives that were not recognized in their churches or other communities. They explain, "When we gather to participate in a rite we are collectively highlighting something that is very important to us." Celebrating their joys, sorrows, and moments of transition within the ritual space creates profound connections among the participants.⁴¹⁶ Laughter, tears, silence, and intense emotion can be released and shared within the safety and support of the circle. They explain, "Ritual action channels millenary wisdom and the power that we have within ourselves. By gathering in a circle to share together the connections with our desires, wishes, concerns, we allow energy to flow and we can feel our power. We generate profound relationships and build community."⁴¹⁷

Participating in a group like Con-spirando is a way to assume responsibility for one's own spiritual growth. In this process, women can nourish themselves from different sources without embracing a guru, teacher, or priest as a spiritual authority who might have the potential to control one's spiritual growth. Non-hierarchical, shared leadership contributes to the creation

⁴¹⁶ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, vi.

⁴¹⁷ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, viii.

of an environment without domination.⁴¹⁸ Shared, rotating leadership does not mean that every person has to take on every role; rather, those suited to leading particular aspects of the ritual may take that role in the moment that it is needed. Hurtado Neira and Seibert-Cuadra explain that shared leadership allows the power of the celebration to be diffused and decentered. They write, “As more women exercise this power they authorize each other. The creation and celebration of rituals establishes itself as a place of empowerment for women.”⁴¹⁹

The *Cuaderno* includes rituals created by the members of the collective as well as rituals created by or adapting content from other sources, most commonly authors from the United States, including Starhawk, Brian Swimme, Diann Neu, and Alice Walker, but also including Asian feminist theologians such as Chyung Hyung Kyung from Korea and Mary John Mananzan from the Philippians. In the following analysis I have given priority to the rituals designed by members of Con-spirando, rather than those borrowed from authors in the U.S. or elsewhere.

The ritual “Primavera: septiembre en Chile” (“Spring: September in Chile”) illustrates several key characteristics of the work of the Con-spirando Collective and highlights its deep connections with liberation theology and the feminist movement. This ritual marks the arrival of spring in Chile and draws together the women’s associations with the month of September, including the military coup d’état of September 11, 1973 that deposed socialist President Salvador Allende and led to Augusto Pinochet’s seventeen-year dictatorship and the national holiday of independence that is celebrated on September 18th.⁴²⁰

Standing in a circle surrounding a brazier, a pot with soil, and a pitcher of water, the women begin the ritual by listening to soft music and calling to mind their associations with the

⁴¹⁸ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, vii.

⁴¹⁹ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, viii.

⁴²⁰ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 11.

phrase “September in Chile.” Invited to share their thoughts and memories, the women mention the natural world (springtime, flowering trees), memories of childhood celebrations of the national holiday (circuses, new clothes, a pair of white shoes given to me as a child, empanadas and red wine), memories of the military coup (fear, death, impotence, disappearances), and family events (my daughter was born in September).⁴²¹ As the sharing continues, one woman plays a drum, slowly and softly at first, then increasing in speed and intensity till arriving at the concluding words: “This is what we are; we are here, September in Chile.”

The next section of the ritual is a prayer of supplication to the fire and the air. The women share first their memories and then their desires for the future in whatever form seems comfortable. One woman sings a song; others tell stories. They ask the fire to “transform their impotence into vision, and their sufferings into energy for change.” They breathe together—the term *con-spirando* is a play on words combining the Spanish words *con* (with) and *respirando* (breathing)—and walk forward into the circle while inhaling and raising their arms, and walk backward while exhaling and lowering their arms. They repeat this shared movement, gathering energy from the repetition.

The final section of the ritual expresses gratitude to the earth and the water. Each woman plants a seed in the pot of soil and waters it. Returning to the circle, they thank the earth for the opportunity to “help in the miracle of its renovation” each spring, and thank the water for making it possible to trust in the strength of life that cycles infinitely and flows through and past the times of violence.

This ritual provides an excellent example of the group’s celebration of aspects of their spirituality that fall outside the boundaries of typical experiences with the churches. Specifically,

⁴²¹ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 12.

this ritual engages two experiences that churches generally ignore: an integration of personal and public memory and engagement with the natural world. Catholic masses and mainline Protestant worship services tend to focus on the historical past (the life of Jesus and life at the time in which the scriptures were written) or the eschatological future. While a sermon or specific prayers of petition might acknowledge current events, the majority of the ritual remains constant from one celebration to the next, providing continuity for participants across space and time but failing to interact with events of the present.

“Primavera: septiembre en Chile” recognizes that the trauma of the years of the military dictatorship is still present for those who lived through the experience.⁴²² It allows a safe space for the women to express and process their feelings and to imagine a time of healing, activities that would not be suited to a ritual with a pre-designed script. Like its liberation theology predecessors, the ritual highlights the relationship between one’s political circumstances and spirituality. The realities of oppression threaten not only one’s physical wellbeing but one’s emotional and spiritual welfare as well. While the liberation theology masses analyzed in the earlier chapters acknowledged that oppression has emotional effects, they reflected on these emotions corporately, not individually. This ritual suggests that before taking on the task of creating a new society, the women need a moment of healing and recuperation; the new society cannot be built on a foundation of fear and anger.

While not completely absent from the tradition, the Christian mainstream typically has not shown a strong appreciation for the natural world. In this ritual as in many others, Con-

⁴²² While the *Cuaderno* does not list a specific creation date for this ritual, the collective published the *Cuaderno* in 1995, only five years after the transition to democracy following Pinochet’s dictatorship. Given how often the theme of suffering during the time of the dictatorship recurs in the Con-spirando rituals, it is clear that the women still felt the trauma of that era deeply. Rituals on other topics, such as “Amigas” (“Friends”), include a moment of reflection for those whom the regime detained or disappeared, “for whom tears are insufficient.” Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 52.

spirando members chose to evoke prehistory or indigenous traditions to express their interest in and care for the natural world rather than engage the Christian traditions that relate to nature (e.g. Hildegard of Bingen, Saint Francis of Assisi). This ritual calls upon the four elements of fire, air, earth, and water as well as the revitalizing cycle of the seasons. It also invites the women to be aware of their bodies—focusing on their breathing, participating in the shared movement of walking forward and backward, and drawing their attention to the energy they share as they engage in synchronized movement. The rituals of most Christian churches shy away from giving the body a prominent role, seeing it as the baser element of the soul/body dualism and therefore suspect.

The problem of engaging with nature, which is difficult in much of mainstream Christianity, is exacerbated in Chile by the difference between the liturgical calendar and the seasons in the Southern Hemisphere. The religious iconography inherited from the European colonizers matched the Christmas season with the cold, dark days close to the winter solstice and the celebration of Easter with the springtime. Images such as the light in the darkness or the evergreen tree that are associated with the European celebration of Christmas cannot have the same emotional resonance for the Chilean Christmas at the height of summer, and insisting on their use heightens the Euro-centric, colonizing aspect of Christianity.⁴²³

Although the “Primavera: septiembre en Chile” ritual does not address itself specifically to the Christian God, the prayers celebrating the natural elements of fire, air, earth, and water are vague enough that a participant of the ritual who claims a Christian identity could imagine the Christian God as the creator of the elements and ultimate recipient of prayers addressed through them.

⁴²³ The ritual “Solsticio de verano” (Summer Solstice) addresses this problem by creating new associations for Christmas with summertime, the outdoors, fresh fruit, happiness, and vacation. See Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 17-19.

The introduction to the ritual “La tierra donde fluye leche y miel” (“The land where milk and honey flow”) highlights the group’s explicit link to the Christian tradition. In finding new ways in which to express their spirituality, the authors⁴²⁴ describe the group’s goal of breaking away from the “patriarchal traditions of Judeo-Christian culture” while maintaining its liberating traditions. This ritual draws on the theme of the Exodus, a story frequently emphasized by liberation theologians. While embracing the utopian vision of the land of milk and honey and aspiring to bring about a new set of functional relationships in history like the earlier liberation theologians, Con-spirando members add an ecological dimension to their task. Not only must relationships among people be reordered to reflect the love and justice of God, relationships between people and the earth must also be transformed.

This simple ritual begins with a pitcher of milk and a jar of honey in the center of the circle. Each of the women serves herself a glass of milk representing the first experiences of love, protection, and nurturance and a spoonful of honey representing the sweetness of life and the joy of living. The ritual consists of short reflections before three sips of milk and three tastes of honey. With the first sip of milk the women bring to mind the people who gave them life, fed and nurtured them, as well as the fundamental elements necessary for living. With the second they consider how even the most basic elements of nourishment are not available to everyone. In particular they think of the women of the South American continent who are unable to provide food for their children or for themselves. With the third sip they think about the challenge of healing the earth so that it can provide abundant food and the challenge of making justice so that no person will go hungry.⁴²⁵

⁴²⁴ The author of this particular ritual is Ute Seibert-Cuadra, but it is not clear who wrote the introduction.

⁴²⁵ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 34.

Similarly, the three tastes of honey evoke themes of satisfaction, needs, and challenges for healing and restoration. With the first taste the women call to mind the sweetness of life, happy occasions, and the people with whom they share that happiness. With the second they reflect on the ways in which contamination of the planet threatens plants, flowers, and bees. They also reflect on people who are limited by their social roles and who have been unable to recognize that they have the right to be free and happy. With the third taste of honey they recognize the challenges of healing the earth, living life to the fullest, and weaving relationships that encourage the fullness of life for all people on the earth. The ritual ends with the women giving thanks for the milk and honey that help them maintain the memory of a simple life and healthy relationships with nature and the earth, as well as the culture of women with relationships of respect and without hierarchy. At the same time, these symbols of abundance call to mind the ways in which present-day culture has deteriorated from this standard and they challenge the women to dream of a renewed utopia.⁴²⁶

While explaining the symbolic importance of milk and honey in ancient cultures, the introduction first presents the theme of “a culture prior to patriarchy, where peace was possible, where there were few weapons, less aggression and where men and women lived in equal status,” a theme that returns in the conclusion.⁴²⁷ This image is familiar among feminists who embrace the Goddess traditions, but Rosemary Radford Ruether among others has challenged the historicity of this purported era of equality.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 34-35.

⁴²⁷ Colectivo Con-spirando, *Cuaderno*, 33.

⁴²⁸ Carol Christ is one of the most prominent writers on the Goddess traditions, and translations of her work appear in the *Revista Con-spirando*. See, for example, Carol P. Christ, “Repensando la teología y la naturaleza,” *Revista Con-spirando* 4 (June 1993): 28-29. See also Carol P. Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 54-60. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: HarperOne, 1992), chap. 6.

Although highlighting the needs of the people who do not have enough to eat and recognizing that poverty is caused by an unjust social system as the earlier liberation theologians did, this ritual also acknowledges that the lives of people who are poor are more precarious because the destruction of the natural world makes cultivating food more difficult. In very few words the second taste of honey highlights the importance of interrelationships in the ecosystem by calling to mind not just the bees who make the honey but the flowers and plants that provide the nectar.

Despite the group's efforts to maintain only the liberating elements of the Christian tradition, this ritual adopts the notion of the Promised Land without consideration for the people who lived on the land prior to the Exodus. As in the earlier critique of the Rite of Peace from Casaldáliga's *Missa da terra sem males* in chapter two, this ritual embraces standard Christian (and, more specifically, popular early Latin American liberation theology) rhetoric without recognizing its oppressive tendencies. While the emphasis on non-hierarchical relationships of respect suggests that the authors wish to operate from a different paradigm, using milk and honey, the symbols of the Promised Land, threatens to accomplish the opposite if the history and experiences of the people who have suffered as a result of this ideology are ignored.

Conclusion

The ritual “La tierra donde fluye leche y miel” illustrates one of the difficulties of the task Christian reformers face: the language and symbols in which the tradition is embedded include oppressive elements, and lifelong familiarity with these elements dulls one's ability to recognize them as such. The process of conscientization that is such an important element of liberation theology includes multiple layers. In its most basic form, as explained by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and elsewhere, the individual becomes aware of the structural forces

operating in society that are oppressive to her or him.⁴²⁹ Most people's social status, however, is bound in a complex web with some aspects of their identities providing relative privilege and others causing disadvantage. Therefore, the process of conscientization must also allow individuals to recognize the ways in which their relative privilege has served to oppress others. Whether analyzing the oppressions acting upon one's life or the oppressions in which one is participating, there is a need to identify the oppression both broadly and in its subtler manifestations.

With respect to liturgical practice there are obvious ways in which groups of people are excluded. Most simply, a person may be denied the opportunity for participation or leadership based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, economic status, etc. Beyond this type of overt exclusion, however, there is the problem of individuals who are permitted to participate in rituals from which their own stories, symbols, images, music, and types of movement are absent. These people are welcome to attend and participate but cannot contribute elements of their heritage to the liturgical experience because the official liturgical vocabulary cannot be expanded.

Although both Casaldáliga and his collaborators and the Con-spirando members intended to use the Christian tradition liberatively, their reliance on the stock phrases, prayers, and symbols of the Christian liturgical vocabulary drew them unwittingly into oppressive quagmires. The authors of the scriptures and the early Christian rituals may not have intended for their words to be oppressive, but the history of the Christian tradition shows that the vocabulary has functioned in that way. Uncovering the layers of hidden oppression and articulating an alternative vision are the ongoing tasks of liberating liturgy.

⁴²⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000).

Epilogue: Liberation Today

This epilogue analyzes two examples of Latin American liturgical and ritual practice from the past five years: the first is *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!*, a collection of liturgical music created by Agua Viva, an ecumenical group in Matanzas, Cuba, and the second is the *Missa da Consciência Negra*, the Mass of Black Consciousness, that premiered in São Paulo, Brazil in 2011. These examples demonstrate that many of the same concerns addressed in the liturgies written approximately thirty-five years ago that were analyzed in earlier chapters are still points of contention for Christian communities in Latin America. The epilogue concludes by naming several issues facing the Latin American churches today and considering the ways in which liturgies can play a role in the work of liberation.

¡Ay, Campiña Mía!

The Cuban CD of liturgical music, *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!*, bears a strong resemblance to the Central American liberation theology masses written in the late 1970s. Like the earlier masses that emphasized God's action in Nicaragua and El Salvador, the songs of *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!* are clearly focused on Cuba. Yet its emphases are different. Whereas the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran masses contrast the unique expressions of Central American faith with the Euro-centric, supposedly universal canonical language of the Catholic Church, the Cuban liturgical songs are in conversation with Cuba's recent past of official atheism and current secularism.

Agua Viva, the group that composed and performed *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!*, belongs to a Protestant ecumenical group associated with the Kairos Center in the city of Matanzas. These songs, therefore, are not a Catholic Mass and are not necessarily a collection of pieces that would be sung in its entirety in a liturgical setting. For example, “Suenen campanas alegres” is a Christmas carol that would only be used seasonally while the other pieces might be sung at any time of year.

One of the immediately striking characteristics of the *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!* collection is its distinctly Cuban musical sound. The song types, rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, and performance style draw from the rich heritage of Cuban music. These musical choices are reinforced by the lyrics in songs such as “Son de alabanza” that emphasize the Cuban people and landscape. The *son* is a characteristically Cuban folk song type that features syncopated rhythms and alternation between a choral refrain and solo verses that developed in the rural areas of eastern Cuba in the late nineteenth century.⁴³⁰ The refrain of “Son de alabanza” (“*Son* of praise”) explicitly mentions the song type and the instruments used to perform it: “I bring claves, guitars, and bongos/I sing my *son* of praise/I want to offer it to God.”⁴³¹

The authors draw attention to the natural beauty of Cuba in several of the songs in the collection. “Son de alabanza” highlights Cuba’s beautiful palm trees, the lovely beaches, and the blue sea and its waves, and it claims that the valleys, hills, and birds join in singing praise to God. Based on Psalm 104, “Ven Espíritu Divino” calls on the Spirit to renew the face of the earth “from the plains to the mountains.” Similarly, “Alaba al Señor” says that God should be praised as “the Father of creation,” and “¡Ay, campiña mía!” names the countryside of Cuba, “the green fields where the sugarcane grows,” as a location in which Christianity “flourishes.” As in the Central American Masses, these natural references are an important way to root the Christian experience in Cuba and to celebrate the God-given beauty of the local landscape. “Ven Espíritu Divino” also suggests a level of ecological awareness that is absent in the thirty-five year-old masses: they implore the Spirit to renew the earth “that is so devastated.”

⁴³⁰ Juan F. Pérez, “El Son,” *Historia y Temas de La Música Cubana*, May 6, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519174432/http://www.juanperez.com/musica/son.html>.

⁴³¹ Agua Viva, *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!*, [Matanzas, Cuba?], n.d., compact disc. Unfortunately, no other publication details are available on the label or the web. All quotations of the lyrics are based on my transcriptions, and all translations are mine.

At the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, representatives of Protestant denominations met to strategize for the evangelization of the non-Christian world. Because the region had been colonized by Catholic Spain and Portugal, the Conference did not view Latin America as a mission field. Six years later representatives from the most conservative branches of the mainline Protestant churches met at the Congress of Panama of 1916 because they were dissatisfied with the omission of Latin America from the Edinburgh agenda. These representatives, primarily from the United States, divided the Latin American nations among themselves as fields of evangelization. In their estimation Latin American Catholics were idolaters who were in need of instruction in true Christianity.⁴³²

The legacy of the conservative and anti-Catholic Protestantism that U.S. missionaries carried to Latin America in the early twentieth century is often apparent. The Agua Viva authors seem to challenge this heritage in recognizing a broader ecumenism, perhaps looking for support from like-minded Catholics in the officially secular Cuban society. The song “Nadie como Jesús” includes an intriguing reference to Mary: “He handed me over to His Mother as my mother and she received me as a son.” While this is a biblical reference to John 19:26-27, the choice to mention Mary could be seen as a friendly overture to Catholics. Mary, particularly in her apparition as *La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity of Cobre) is particularly important to Cubans. The legend of *La Caridad del Cobre* dates back to the seventeenth century; in 1687 Juan Moreno, an African slave, gave testimony that as a child he and two other men had discovered the statue of *La Virgen* floating in the sea in 1613.⁴³³ In the mid-nineteenth century Cuban nationalists claimed her image as a symbol of the independence

⁴³² Edwin Mora Guevara, *La celebración Cristiana: Renovación litúrgica contextual* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Sebila, 2009), 47-49.

⁴³³ Michelle A. Gonzalez, *Afro-Cuban Theology: Religion, Race, Culture, and Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 80.

movement, and when Cuba finally gained independence from Spain in 1898, devotees of *La Caridad* left gifts and offerings of gratitude at her shrine.⁴³⁴ In 1916 Pope Benedict XV officially named *La Caridad* the patroness of Cuba.⁴³⁵ Because Protestant groups in Cuba have long been reluctant to engage with the figure of Mary, seeing Catholic devotion to her as idolatrous, the reference to her in “Nadie como Jesús” stands out as a gesture of respect for Catholic tradition and participation in the observance of a Cuban national symbol, while maintaining a characteristically Protestant emphasis on the biblical text. Similarly the song “Instrumento de Paz,” which paraphrases the Prayer of Saint Francis, indicates a softening of antipathy toward the Catholic tradition of the veneration of the saints.

Perhaps another vestige of the conservative Protestant missionary heritage can be found in the lack of inclusive language in the songs. The lyrics consistently use male language for God with a heavy emphasis on the title “Señor.” Although it is not surprising that female references to God are absent, the composers might have chosen to use names for God that do not correspond to human genders (i.e. Wisdom, Love, Mystery), which would have indicated that they are attentive to the issue of gendered language and desire to move away from exclusively male-centered metaphors. As the lyrics stand, they do not give any indication that the composers recognize a need to expand beyond traditional titles for God.

Given women’s relatively high standard of equality within Cuban society, the lack of inclusive language to refer to human beings is more surprising. The song “Así nos quiere el Señor,” for example, repeatedly uses the phrase “Hermano, hermano” to refer to all fellow Christians, and “¡Ay, campiña mía!” speaks of equality with one’s brothers. While the traditional

⁴³⁴ Gonzalez, *Afro-Cuban Theology*, 84. Gonzalez also explains that after Castro’s Revolution, grateful Cubans repeated the ritual.

⁴³⁵ Gonzalez, *Afro-Cuban Theology*, 82.

rules of Spanish grammar use plural masculine nouns to describe mixed groups of men and women, this practice is strongly challenged in contemporary usage. Accommodating inclusive language in song lyrics can be difficult given the limited number of syllables available in strict metrical patterns, but in “Así nos quiere el Señor” there is no reason why the authors could not have taken advantage of the repetition and written the lyrics as “Hermano, hermana” (or “Hermana, hermano”). Even such a small change would have signaled the authors’ awareness of the issues of inclusion embedded in the rules of grammar, and such signals can make a profound difference in the experience of those who listen to and sing these liturgical pieces. The majority of the songs on the CD—eleven of thirteen—feature a male soloist who (reasonably) uses the masculine form of words referring to himself. It would be interesting to know if in practice women sometimes lead these songs and if they change the masculine grammatical forms when they do so or maintain the texts as they are.

Several of the songs in the collection propose an active faith that is engaged with social justice issues. The authors indicate that service to those who suffer, feeding the hungry, and creating a more peaceful world are the responsibilities of people of faith. “¡Ay, campiña mía!” suggests that cultivating crops in the fields is a joint endeavor between God and humans, and “Así nos quiere el Señor” explains that Christians need to join hands to build a better world together. The authors challenge the other-worldly spirituality of many of the evangelical groups in Latin America and call upon Christians to collaborate with God in creating a better world. Expanding the liturgical vocabulary beyond traditional biblical language, “Esperanza Candombera” refers to solidarity and human rights, and “Fe y Esperanza Viva” suggests the need to organize.

Based on the song lyrics, it is difficult assess whether the authors see the Christian message as allied with the goals of the Cuban Revolution or as offering a contrasting worldview. Clearly they share goals of education, eliminating poverty, and living in equality, freedom, and peace. The questions arise, however, in defining terms such as equality and freedom. In some respects the authors seem to have a more limited view of equality. The Revolution places great emphasis on equality with respect to women and blacks—topics that seem to be absent from these songs. Similarly, Cuban society is currently addressing issues of heteronormativity and LGBTQ rights, which the songs do not engage.⁴³⁶ On the other hand, the songs may offer a critique to the promises of the Revolution that have not yet come to fulfillment. “Así como Tú, Señor” claims: “Love is the servant of the one who suffers/Poverty, hunger, and ignorance/It is to fight together with Him for liberation/And to fill the future with hope.” If the Revolution had successfully accomplished its goals, the authors would not need to address poverty, hunger, and ignorance as part of the daily life of Cubans.

The text of the Christmas song “Suenen campanas alegres” (“Ring Joyful Bells”) draws from the biblical text Luke 2:14, “Glory to God in the highest and let there be peace on the earth.” There is nothing unusual in the text that describes the joy and celebration at the birth of the baby in the manger. Yet this piece takes on added valence given recent Cuban history. From 1969-1998 Christmas was not observed as a national holiday, and employees were not able to take time off work to celebrate. After Pope John Paul II’s visit to Cuba in 1998, the government reinstated Christmas as an officially recognized holiday.⁴³⁷ The seemingly innocuous phrases,

⁴³⁶ Editorial, “La evolución del movimiento gay en Cuba,” *New York Times*, Dec. 20, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/opinion/la-evolucion-del-movimiento-gay-en-cuba.html>.

⁴³⁷ J. Gordon Melton and Clifton L. Holland, “Cuba,” in *Religions of the World: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Beliefs and Practices*, eds. J. Gordon Melton and Martin Baumann (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 830. In 2014 the National Assembly of Popular Power passed a law establishing Good Friday as a recognized

“We celebrate Christmas,” “We happily throw a party,” and “All full of joy we are going to celebrate,” take on added meaning when considered in light of the recent past in which such celebrations were restricted.

Considering the decades-long sensitive place of the Cuban churches within society, it is interesting that the authors touch on the issue of evangelization in several songs. The song “¡Ay, campiña mía!” presents two different views of the issue: one may be aspirational for the authors, and the other perhaps more realistic. Ignoring the religious diversity that has always been present in the nation, the first verse suggests that all Cubans are Christians and want to worship God:

En los campos de mi Cuba	In the countryside of my Cuba
Florece un aire Cristiano	A Christian air flourishes
Es que todos los Cubanos	It is that all Cubans
Llevan en su corazón	Carry in their hearts
El deseo y la ilusión	The desire and wish
De vivir junto a su Dios	To live together with their God
Y a la par con sus hermanos	And together with their brothers
Adorar a su Señor	Worship their Lord

The last verse, however, acknowledges that the work of evangelization is still to be accomplished. Not all Cubans are Christians, even if the authors think they should be. After invoking God’s blessing and the Spirit’s presence, the verse implores “And [may] all Cubans/from the countryside and from the city/praise in truth/Christ, Lord and Brother.”

Missa da Consciência Negra

The *Missa da Consciência Negra* premiered on November 20, 2011 in the Santuário São Judas Tadeu in São Paolo, Brazil as part of the celebration of the national holiday, the *Dia da Consciência Negra*. The organizers of the *Missa*, Paulo Flores and Padre Antonio Luciano, created a website to promote its premiere that includes a brief introduction, an outline of the

holiday as well. See “Recesan las actividades laborales el viernes 18 de abril,” *Granma*, April 15, 2014, <http://www.granma.cu/cuba/2014-04-15/recesan-las-actividades-laborales-el-viernes-18-de-abril>.

prayers of the mass and the lyrics for the songs, the musical scores for several of the songs, a series of short introductory videos with Luciano singing and playing the guitar, and a link to a video of the *Missa dos Quilombos*.

The website does not specify what roles Flores and Luciano played in the development of the *Missa*. While they are the driving force organizing the particular celebration of the *Missa* in 2011 at the Santuário São Judas Tadeu, it is unclear how much of the content of the mass was created specifically for that event. A few of the songs appear to have been borrowed from other sources: the Gloria is adapted from the folk song, “Tá caindo fulô,”⁴³⁸ and the communion and closing songs seem to have been borrowed from the *Missa Afro* from the city of Paiçandu in southern Brazil.⁴³⁹ Flores and Luciano may have collaborated in writing the remaining music and lyrics, or one or the other may have been solely responsible. In the analysis that follows, I refer to the authors of each piece generically since I have no way of knowing whether Flores and Luciano wrote, adapted, or merely collected the lyrics of any given song. My analysis of the theological perspective rests on the final version of the lyrics which may reflect the work of several authors. I consider Flores and Luciano responsible for the final content of the *Missa*, but I note the contrasting theological perspectives evident among various songs.

⁴³⁸ See performances of “Tá caindo fulô” by various artists including Katya Teixeira, YouTube video, 3:24, posted by “Conversacomverso,” Dec. 2, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519175035/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxIQjQccr64> and the bands Uakti, YouTube video, 3:10, posted by Tom Alves, May 21, 2009, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519175113/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gkVifxHNeg>, Meninas de Sinhá, YouTube video 3:15, posted by Marcelo LaCarretta, Dec. 3, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519175226/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLKR6RASr9U>, and Casa de Farinha, YouTube video, 3:19, posted by Rozana Soares, Mar. 31, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519175314/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3svrTG0Mcw>.

⁴³⁹ A group from the parish of Jesus Bom Pastor de Paiçandu in the Archdiocese of Maringá posted videos of “Tá na hora de partilhar” and “Dança aí negro nagô” on YouTube in 2010. See YouTube video, 5:09, posted by Pastoral Afro da Arquidiocese de Maringá, Nov. 24, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519174945/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuIiOp5PKEI> and YouTube video, 2:19, posted by Pastoral Afro da Arquidiocese de Maringá, Nov. 26, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160519174851/><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lsI1XoSksU>.

The written introduction to the *Missa* explains why the civic holiday *Dia da Consciência Negra*, which honors the legacy of Zumbi of Palmares and advocates for continued efforts to improve conditions for Afro-Brazilians, should be celebrated in a religious context. The introduction describes the oppressive ideology of the Brazilian ruling class as contrary to God's will and as a moral stumbling block. It explains that the inequalities of modern Brazilian society have their roots in the institution of slavery and continue to operate in the exploitation of the many so the few can live in luxury. The prevailing economic system classifies people as good or bad according to their possessions and patterns of consumption, and it pits exploited members of society against each other by forcing them to fight for space and status.⁴⁴⁰ Recognizing the moral component to these societal patterns, the introduction identifies the civic holiday's celebration of Afro-Brazilian empowerment and call for renewed efforts to fight for freedom for all members of society as responsibilities that align with God's call for justice.

By including a link to the *Missa dos Quilombos* video on the website, Flores and Luciano signal their desire to place their work in a lineage with the Casaldáliga/Tierra/Nacimiento liturgy, but their relationship to the earlier work is ambiguous. The legacy is clearly evident in the theme and purpose of the mass, but the newer liturgy operates out of a very different theological and socio-political ideology. Where the *Missa dos Quilombos* presumes a liberation theology mindset in which Christians must play an active role in bringing about the transformation of society, the *Missa da Consciência Negra* generally suggests a more passive role for believers. Christians can trust that the day will come when suffering will end, but there is little that can be done to hasten its arrival. The message—central to the *Missa dos Quilombos*—that the church must repent for its sins against the Afro-Brazilian community is completely

⁴⁴⁰ Paulo Flores, "Missa da Consciência Negra," accessed July 28, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160426043304/http://missaconsciencianegra.blogspot.com/>.

absent from the *Missa da Consciência Negra*. Although the authors may see themselves in the lineage of Casaldáliga and his collaborators, their message is timid and lacks the prophetic challenge issued by the earlier work.

Given the relationship between the Catholic hierarchy and the liberation theology movement in Brazil and across Latin America, it is not surprising that the *Missa da Consciência Negra* lacks the prophetic strength of its predecessor. During his papacy John Paul II silenced theologians, closed seminaries and pastoral centers, and replaced retiring progressive bishops with ultra-conservative ones. In 1979 the premiere of the *Missa da terra sem males*, a liturgy that severely denounced the sins committed by the church, was concelebrated by almost forty Brazilian bishops. Three decades later that generation of bishops was largely gone, replaced by those committed to upholding the authority of the hierarchy of the institutional church. The top-down ecclesiology promoted by the bishops appointed by John Paul II and Benedict XVI operates at the expense of bottom-up liberation theologies that prioritize as the locus of theological exploration the experiences of those who suffer and who lack institutional power.

The lyrics of “Abertura,” the opening song, illustrate this difference in tone from the *Missa dos Quilombos*: “It is with much fasting, vigil and prayer/that the People of God walk for the day of liberation/And the Black people walk for the day of liberation.” While the goal of liberation is maintained, the people are asked to fast, keep vigil, and pray—not to challenge the oppressive social order or to work for justice. Fasting, keeping vigil, and praying are familiar actions in the vocabulary of Christian piety, but they rely exclusively on spiritual means to address problems that are both physical and spiritual in nature. Fasting, in particular, seems to be counterproductive advice for a group of people who may lack the financial resources to enjoy healthy meals regularly. The materialism that is so prominent in the thinking of the early

liberation theologians has been replaced here with a spiritualized theological understanding that fails to acknowledge the daily lives of the people.

The “Saudaçāo,” or greeting, suggests that the authors may be attempting to avoid what they consider to be the excesses of liberation theology. The lyrics implore God to have mercy on “my enemies” and to “teach me to love.” Pope John Paul II severely criticized liberation theology for its embrace of socialist language and the association of liberation theologians (including Ernesto Cardenal among others) with socialist movements or regimes. Among the criticisms of socialism was the notion that class struggle is incompatible with the Christian requirement to love one’s neighbor. Although the “Saudaçāo” acknowledges that “my enemies” exist, it does not name the enemies as those who oppress Black people. The “enemies” lack context and specificity even in a Mass of Black Consciousness. Whereas a liberation theology text might ask God to turn the hearts of the enemies to conversion, the lyrics here ask God to have mercy on the enemies and to teach the (singing) subject to love, a posture that, while virtuous, is unlikely to mobilize social change.

Similarly the Gospel Acclamation uses imagery that is removed from everyday reality. Perhaps drawing on the text of Revelation 20:2, the Gospel Acclamation praises Jesus for having destroyed the head of the ancient dragon. While poetic license and metaphorical language are tremendously important to the composition of powerful lyrics, naming a dragon (or the devil, if this is in fact a reference to the text in Revelation) instead of a racist social system as the obstacle to be overcome reduces the immediacy of this song. In this case symbolic language distances the believer’s moral obligation from everyday experience. The people, who presumably do not encounter dragons, have nothing to contribute; only Jesus is capable of acting. The people

implore Jesus: “Come help me, come console me, come liberate me,” but then must wait passively.

The prayer following the Gloria seems out of step with the *Missa*’s overall theological stance as it asks God to grant the believers Zumbi’s strength in the face of adversity. As a warrior who fought and killed the colonizers and slaveholders in an attempt to liberate his people, Zumbi seems an unlikely role model. If the road to liberation is meant to be walked by fasting, keeping vigil, and praying, Zumbi’s legacy does not contribute to the Catholic praxis outlined in much of the *Missa*. Even in a context that embraces liberation theology and includes transforming the social order as a central goal of believers’ efforts, honoring Zumbi might raise red flags for those troubled by his use of violence. Here in the *Missa da Consciência Negra* the reference to Zumbi, a gesture to honor the national hero recognized on the Day of Black Consciousness, threatens to disrupt the overarching theological stance.

After the gospel the *Missa* includes a song, “Com a Virgem Mãe coroando Cristo Rei” (“With the Virgin Mary Crowning Christ the King”), that refers to May 13th, the day of the passage of the Golden Law abolishing slavery in Brazil in 1888. The lyrics explain, “The captivity ended... we left hell today.” This suggests that the problem of slavery ended with its abolition. In great contrast to the Afro-Brazilian activists cited above in chapter three, the authors of the *Missa* are willing to brush aside the legacy of racism that is still thriving. If the authors believe that the abolition of slavery accomplished the work of justice, then the celebration of the Day of Black Consciousness is merely a memorial that marks a momentous occasion in the past. The activists who sought national recognition for the holiday did so because they believed that the racism present in society requires a continuing struggle for justice. The prayer after the Profession of Faith likewise recognizes only the pain of the past. The authors acknowledge the

anguish, pain, disease, hunger, and poverty in the era of the slave ships and direct slavery, but imply that this era has passed and the suffering with it.

Interestingly, the “Ofertório” (Offertory) song strikes a different tone on this theme, and demonstrates a strong connection to liberation theology. The lyrics explain that Brazilians in the Northeast who have nothing seek a piece of land and that the struggle of the oppressed peoples can transform the nation. This illustrates three important premises of liberation theology: people’s needs are physical as well as spiritual, the work of overcoming injustice has not been completed, and the struggles of the people can be efficacious in establishing right relationships. The lyrics call to mind the history of the quilombos of Palmares, Canudos, and Cabanas and claim that this history is alive in the struggles of today. The modest offerings of the poor, the struggle to transform the nation, the legacy of people who fight for freedom, and the blood of the people that fertilizes the ground are offered to God with the bread and wine. In return God offers courage and the strength that destroys death, changes one’s destiny, and is resurrection.

The sung “Oração pela paz” (Prayer for Peace) that precedes the Agnus Dei presents a utopian vision of a new heaven and a new earth in which the oppressed will sing of their freedom in a single voice. Those who have suffered “will be the judges of the world of sin,” while “the strong, the great, and the arrogant” will “weep and gnash their teeth.” This vision is presented entirely in the future tense; it will come to pass someday. It does not engage a realized eschatology or the simultaneous sense that the kingdom of God exists already even if not in its fullness. The lyrics do not suggest any role for the believer in bringing about this reality. It simply will exist sometime in the future. On the other hand, this song identifies more clearly the groups of people who suffer under the present social order than the others in the *Missa*: Blacks,

indigenous peoples, mulattos, and women are among those who are weak, poor, and downtrodden now.

Among the strengths of the *Missa da Consciência Negra* are a modest recognition of the suffering of women and the use of inclusive language to describe human beings. The Ato Penitential (Penitential Rite) uses gender inclusive language for humans by describing walking hand in hand with God, with brother, and with sister. The Prayer for Peace includes a verse for women: “In the new earth the woman will have rights/She will not suffer humiliation and prejudice/And everyone will value her work/She will participate in making decisions.”

Like the “Oração pela paz,” the “Canto de comunhão” explicitly names the groups of people who suffer in Brazilian society. Even the most disadvantaged can join at the altar to receive communion. Blacks join with those who are impoverished, hungry, weeping, hated, wronged, rejected, pursued, seeking justice, promoting peace, afflicted, and marginalized to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The lyrics are grounded in the local reality, but while they acknowledge that these many forms of suffering exist, they fail to analyze why these people suffer.

The *Missa da Consciência Negra* demonstrates a conflicted relationship to liberation theology perhaps due to the many authors who contributed to the final version of the lyrics. Given the history of the relationship between Church hierarchy and liberation theologians, it may be that the authors admire the work of Casaldáliga and his collaborators but fear emulating it too directly. They may be attempting to draw from its strengths while feeling pressured to sanitize and domesticate the liberation language that brought down the heavy hand of the hierarchy. Or, they may wish to redo what they believe had been done badly. They may recognize that Casaldáliga’s masses touched a chord with the Brazilian people who acknowledge the

disjuncture between the Church's goals of bringing love and peace into the world and the colonial and slaveholding legacy in which the Church all too gladly participated. This *Missa* written on the theme of Black consciousness may be an attempt to address the moral problem created by the Church's actions while attempting to avoid the problematic liberation language that draws the disapproval of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In their unwillingness to engage directly with Brazil's social problems in the lyrics of the *Missa*, the authors miss the opportunity for a powerful religious contribution to the celebration of the *Dia da Consciência Negra*. The *Missa* is able to honor the achievements of the past, but it offers little to the ongoing struggle for racial justice in Brazil.

Projects of Liberation

Both *¡Ay, Campiña Mía!* and the *Missa da Consciência Negra* demonstrate that the issues of coloniality and racism addressed by the early Latin American liberation theology movement still create tension within Christian communities. The work of dismantling these forms of structural oppression is ongoing, and liturgy remains a significant medium through which this work can be accomplished. Engaging both intellect and emotion, liturgy enfleshes a utopian vision and makes it real, even if only within the ritual time and space. Although bounded, liturgical experiences of a just and loving community can inspire, strengthen, and energize the ongoing liberation of liturgy, church, and society.

It is ironic that finding documentation of liturgies from the past five years has proven to be more difficult than finding detailed information about the liturgies written several decades earlier. Despite the ease and relatively low cost of electronic publication, it is difficult to find detailed information about the content of recently written liturgies. In some settings, groups that create liberating liturgies may be reluctant to share them due to the lack of institutional support

for liberation theology and liberation projects in their wider church communities. Most likely creative groups are hindered by the lack of funding and the amount of time required to transcribe a script or to edit video content for a website. The Núcleo Mujeres y Teología in Guatemala sponsors annual conferences that conclude with an original ritual. In a personal e-mail, Judy Ress described how beautiful and moving she found the closing ritual of the 2014 conference, “Hacia una teo-ética feminista para generar cambios” (Toward a feminist theo-ethic to generate change). Unfortunately, I have only been able to access a few photographs and have no further documentation of the content of the ritual. Similarly, indigenous groups in Brazil, Bolivia, and elsewhere are engaged in political and social struggles for their rights and ability to maintain their cultures, languages, and land. It is very likely that indigenous Christians have used liturgies and ritual in these struggles, but my attempts to contact communities of sisters working in Brazil have gone unanswered. These creative liturgies exist and play an important role for the groups that create them, and the task remains to make them available (as appropriate) to wider audiences.

Liberation-minded Christians in Latin America have also turned their attention to issues that were not strongly represented in the earlier liturgies. The Network of Queer Theologies and Pastoral Work includes ministers and theologians who are engaged in creating a welcoming environment within the churches for all persons in the queer community. Liturgically, this can be manifest in simple tasks, such as rewriting wedding liturgies to be appropriate to the given situation, or it might require bigger gestures that could be written following the example of the Pedro Casaldáliga liturgies. Acknowledging the religious diversity in Latin America, GEMRIP (Grupo de Estudios Multidisciplinarios sobre Religión e Incidencia Pública) sponsored an interreligious conference in Buenos Aires in October 2015 that concluded with an interreligious

liturgy. Addressing the issues of religious diversity and increasing secularism requires Latin American Christians to acknowledge and take responsibility for the privilege they have enjoyed for centuries.

The Christian churches in Latin America face a continuing struggle with issues of coloniality, racism, sexism, heteronormativity, religious privilege, and destruction of the natural environment. This dissertation is one effort to promote Latin American liturgists' creativity and vision as they further the ongoing work of liberating liturgy.

Appendix: Liturgy of Storytelling

This appendix includes the beginning elements of a musical performance piece for women's voices that shares the insights of Latin American feminist theologians and reflects Latin American women's engagement with spirituality. I have written the first two songs and hope to have the opportunity to complete a full-length project.

It begins with a song that introduces the concept of a circle ritual in which women share stories of their experiences and encounters with the sacred in their lives. This eventually will be followed by a series of solo pieces in which each woman shares her experiences with the group and in turn receives their wisdom and support. The first song, "En este círculo" ("In This Circle"), is an invitation to share stories of one's life and experiences. Acknowledging that everyone has a story to tell, it invites participants to share their stories, dreams, joys, and sorrows in the circle of wisdom and love. Just as feminist theologians rigorously analyze scripture and religious traditions to distinguish elements that are life-giving from those that are oppressive, this song invites women to consider their inherited traditions—religious, cultural, and social—to identify which are helpful and which are harmful. The circle is a place of healing in which tears can be shed and where conversation, laughter, and solidarity can inspire dreams of a better future.

"Quisiera creer" ("I'd Like to Believe") is the first of a series of solo pieces, each describing one individual's engagement with spirituality. In "Quisiera creer," the protagonist expresses her wish to believe in a God of love, justice, and mercy while simultaneously struggling with the problem of theodicy, the failed promises of liberation theology, and the behavior of Christians whose smug certainty and lack of compassion contradict her

understanding of Jesus. She wants to have faith but is troubled by what she perceives as evidence countering the existence of the God in whom she would like to believe.

Other pieces might focus on the moral dilemma of a mother who lacks safe employment but is determined to provide food for her children; the transition from a childhood faith in which an individual accepts everything she was taught to an adult faith in which she can question and engage her tradition critically without fear of her faith collapsing; the search for integrity of an individual who has suffered physical abuse; the opening of a rigidly traditional Christianity to integrate the natural world and ecofeminist insights as meaningful components of spirituality; the grieving process that follows the death of a loved one; the struggle for recovery from substance abuse; the fear of facing one's mortality during an illness; the process of reconciling with a family member after years of estrangement; and the struggle to find meaning as one advances in years.

While the experiences depicted in these scenarios are shaped by the particularities of their contexts, many aspects of these spiritual journeys have wider resonance. I can envision this piece being performed for church communities and used as a starting point for reflection and discussion. Through music and storytelling it introduces Latin American feminist theology to wider audiences and invites reflection on justice issues facing churches and society. For audiences in the United States particularly, its focus on Latin American women is a valuable opportunity to highlight the experiences of an often marginalized population.

En este círculo

Ann Hidalgo

B♭ E♭ F G m E♭ C m F B♭

6 sueñ - os Que a - ni - man tus dí - as. To - das tra-e - mos cuen - tos De_a-le -

II gŕias y su - fri - mien - tos Pa-ra com - par - tir en es-te cir-cu-lo De sa - bi-du-ri - a_y

16 de - a - mor.

To verses Final ending

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Verse 1

The musical score consists of four staves of music in 4/4 time, key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a tempo of 120 BPM. The instruments include a treble clef part, a bass clef part, a guitar/bass part, and a piano/vocal part.

Chords: E♭, F, Gm, B♭, Dm, Gm, Eb, F, B♭, D, Gm, E♭, F, B♭, E♭, F.

Lyrics:

- 1-4: En es-te cír-cu-lo es-cu - cha-mos el pa-sa-do, Dis-tin-guien-do ver-dad-es de men - ti - ras, Re-co-
- 5-8: gien - do per - las de sa - bi-du-rí - a, Y cor - tan - do las re-des que a - tra - pan.
- 9-12: Cuen - tos nos en-señ-an quien-es so - mos y cre-an lo que que-re - mos ser. De las his-
- 13-16: to-rias de las gen - er-a - cion - es He-re - da-mos fuer-za, es-pe - ran-za y fe.

Verse 2

17 E♭ F Gm E♭ F B♭

17 En es-te círculo la-men - ta - mos las pen-as, Re-cor - dan - do los sueñ-os ol-vi - da - dos. O-

17

21 E♭ F Dm Gm E♭ F

21 i - mos lo que nun-ca se ha con - ta - do Y hon - ra - mos vi-das des-pre - cia - das.

21

25 E♭ F B♭ E♭ D Gm

25 A-sí la sa-na-ción em - pie - za. Al com-par - tir se a-li - via el do - lor. Las

25

29 E♭ F B♭ E♭ F

29 lá - gri-mas sa-nan las her - i - das Y la so - li - da - ri - dad nos for - ta - le - ce.

29

Verse 3

33 E♭ F Gm E♭ F B♭

33 En este círculo celebra mos jun-tas, Sofán - do un mun - do me - jor. La un-

33

37 E♭ F Dm Gm E♭ F

37 ión es más pro - fun - da Que lo que nos pue - de se - par - ar.

37

41 E♭ F B♭ E♭ D Gm

41 Con-ver-san-do sur-gen las i - de - as; Ri - en-do bro-ta la in-spi - ra - ción. De

41

45 E♭ F B♭ E♭ F

45 nues-tró tiem-po com - par - ti - do Na-ce la co-mu-ni-dad de a - mor.

45

En este círculo

(R)

Abuela, amiga, compañera,
Cuéntanos de tu vida:
Las historias y los sueños
Que animan tus días.
Todas traemos cuentos
De alegrías y sufrimientos
Para compartir en este círculo
De sabiduría y de amor.

(V 1)

En este círculo escuchamos el pasado,
Distinguiendo verdades de mentiras,
Recogiendo perlas de sabiduría,
Y cortando las redes que atrapan.
Cuentos nos enseñan quienes somos
Y crean lo que queremos ser.
De las historias de las generaciones
Heredamos fuerza, esperanza, y fe.

(V 2)

En este círculo lamentamos las penas,
Recordando los sueños olvidados.
Oímos lo que nunca se ha contado
Y honramos vidas despreciadas.
Así la sanación empieza.
Al compartir se alivia el dolor.
Las lágrimas sanan las heridas
Y la solidaridad nos fortalece.

(V 3)

En este círculo celebramos juntas,
Soñando un mundo mejor.
La unión es más profunda
Que lo que nos puede separar.
Conversando surgen las ideas;
Riendo brota la inspiración.
De nuestro tiempo compartido
Nace la comunidad de amor.

In this circle

Grandmother, friend, companion,
Tell us about your life:
The stories and the dreams
That enliven your days.
We all bring stories
Of joys and sorrows
To share in this circle
Of wisdom and of love.

In this circle we listen to the past,
Distinguishing truths from lies,
Gathering pearls of wisdom,
And cutting the nets that entrap us.
Stories teach us who we are
And create that which we would like to be.
From the stories of the generations
We inherit strength, hope, and faith.

In this circle we lament the sufferings,
Remembering forgotten dreams.
We hear what has never been spoken
And honor disregarded lives.
In this way healing begins.
Sharing alleviates the pain.
Tears heal the wounds
And solidarity strengthens us.

In this circle we celebrate together,
Dreaming a better world.
Our union is deeper
Than that which can separate us.
Ideas arise as we converse;
As we laugh inspiration springs up.
From the time we share
The community of love is born.

Quisiera creer

Quisiera creer que Dios es amor
pero oigo gente llorando
Quisiera creer que Dios es justo
pero veo inocentes sufriendo
Quisiera creer que Dios está del lado
de la gente pobre
pero parece que nada cambia
Los que tienen ventajas las mantienen
y los demás esperan.

Quisiera creer en la Misericordia
pero hablan del infierno
Quisiera creer en el Misterio
pero pretenden saberlo todo
Quisiera creer que los cristianos
protegerían a los vulnerables
Pero día tras día
veo lo opuesto.

Quisiera creer que
Amor crea estrellas
Ternura da vida al polvo
Sabiduría nos enseña a sanar heridas

Quisiera creer que Dios nos ama
y que tod@s podemos amar
Quisiera creer en la abundancia
y en la voluntad para compartir
Quisiera creer que nuestra esperanza
esté sembrada en tierra fértil
Y que hoy podamos escoger mejor que ayer
y mañana mejor que hoy.

Quisiera creer.

I'd like to Believe

I'd like to believe that God is love
but I hear people crying
I'd like to believe that God is just
but I see the innocent suffering
I'd like to believe that God is
on the side of people who are poor
but it seems like nothing changes
Those who have advantages maintain them
and the rest wait.

I'd like to believe in Mercy
but they speak of hell
I'd like to believe in Mystery
but they act as though they know it all
I'd like to believe that Christians
would protect the vulnerable
But day after day
I see the opposite.

I'd like to believe that
Love creates stars
Tenderness brings life to the dust
Wisdom teaches us to heal wounds

I'd like to believe that God loves us
and that all are able to love
I'd like to believe in abundance
and in the will to share
I'd like to believe that our hope
is planted in fertile ground
And that today we will be able to choose more wisely than yesterday and tomorrow better than today.

I'd like to believe.

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